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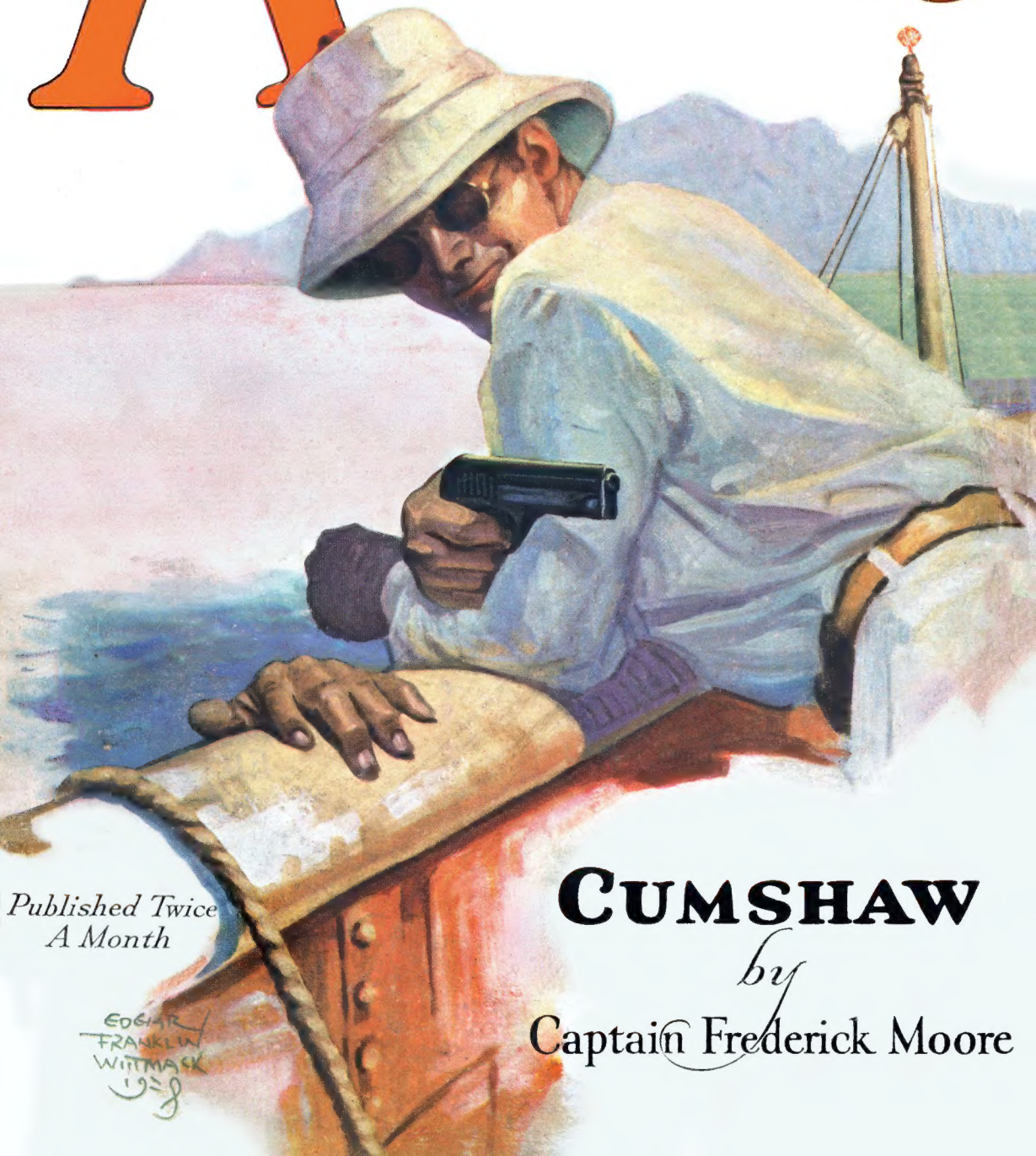

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BIGGER 'N BIGGAR

North o' the Missouri—
and a
Range War
Between Brothers

A Novelette by BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

CHAPTER I

THE BEAUCHAMP RANGE

ANY MAN will fight for his life. Most men will fight for a woman. A good many enterprising fellows will fight for money. An odd one here and there will fight for an idea. And if the idea is fixed and powerful, if it burns in his brain brightly, he will fight for it with the desperation of a cornered wolf, the fury of a lover, with a recklessness beyond that of any soldier of fortune.

Wally Biggar belonged in the latter category. He had an idea. It seemed to him important. He had always been willing not only to fight for it, but to work

for it—which takes just as much courage and frequently a great deal more endurance than mere fighting.

The trouble with Wally's idea lay in its being based on an assumption instead of a fact. He had plenty of warrant for this assumption. All the way from Texas to Canada cowmen had embraced the same idea. Here and there they had made it good against all comers—except in such regions as were swamped by a flood of agriculture and industry, which always puts an end to cattle kings and their feudal privileges.

Wally Biggar's idea was simply this: that by virtue of an established ranch and range on Beauchamp Creek, he owned and controlled by divine right of occupancy all land, grass, and water within a radius of thirty miles.

No other cattleman ever disputed such a claim. It was an understood thing in the cattle country. They were all engaged in upholding the same sort of over-

lordship with considerable success. But the sheepman, who was a horse, so to speak, of a different color, frequently challenged this claim, thereby disturbing the tranquillity of the range to a great or small extent, according to his resources, determination and available man-power.

Wally sat in the bar of a hotel in Malta, foregathered with two other cattlemen, expounding his idea. His left hand held the dwindling stub of a cigaret and the fingers of his right drummed a tattoo on the green covered top of a poker table. Across from him sat old Ches Williams, who ran the biggest cow outfit in that corner of Montana, and Tuck Munger, boss of the Star and Compass, ranging south of the Larb Hills. The three men were neighbors, each on a point of a thirty-five mile triangle.

"Quit drummin' with your mudhooks, Wally," Tuck drawled. "You make me nervous. Take a glass in your hand if you got to have your fingers busy."

He signaled the bartender.

"You'd josh at a funeral," Wally Biggar protested. "I ain't drinkin' an' you know it. I tell you again that if J. B. gets a foothold north of the Missouri, in five years he'll put us all outa business."

"I think you exaggerate," old Ches Williams remarked. "He isn't fool enough to undertake that serious. He knows that while sheep pass through, no sheepman has ever located permanent on our range. It seems to me you are in a position to make this particular sheepman see reason without goin' straight off on the warpath."

"Only times I ever knew him to be open to reason," Wally frowned, "was when somebody had him under the gun. He ain't a reasonable man."

"You ought to know the family failin's," Tuck grinned.

"Don't rub it in," Wally growled. "I can't help him bein' my brother."

"Shucks," old Ches said. "J. B.'s all right—only he's a mite aggressive, now that he's developed a political pull. He's in the sheep business same as we're in the cow business—to make money."

"Well, neither him nor any other owner of stinkin', blattin' flocks is goin' to make money at my expense," Wally declared. "I figured you two ought to be interested enough to show a united front. If you're goin' to lay back an' wait for him to move in on us, why I expect I can handle him myself."

"Don't go off half cocked," old Ches advised. "Take it easy. Keep us posted. Nobody's going to take kindly to J. B's sheep. Beauchamp is no place for 'em. But you try reasonin' with him first. You know him."

That was the trouble, Wally reflected, jogging alone out the south trail. He did know Jim Biggar. Heavy handed, stubborn as a fool. Successful in the sheep business, Wally often said to himself contemptuously, because he was like a sheep—nobody else could thrive where he got a foothold. Colonel J. B. Biggar. Colonel in the State militia! Wally snorted. Their father had earned a colonel's brevet under Grant.

Wally topped the last rise that pitched down to the Beauchamp. Here he paused to rest his gloved hands on the saddle horn, to look and ponder.

FRESH from checker board fields of corn and pumpkin and clover; from shady groves of elm, ash and oak, the outlander views the cattle country lying in a vast sweep along the eastern foot of the Rockies with an uncomprehending, jaundiced eye. It seems no more than an empty, arid waste, incapable of sustaining life in the pleasant forms to which he is accustomed. It is all dry grass, where rattlesnakes crawl, gray sage rolling away like the sea, the habitat of wolves. A burning sun scorches this bald monotony from May to October. From November to April snow and raw winds add to the desolation. He will say it is a desert, forgotten by God and fit for neither man nor beast.

Yet even a desert has its uses and charm. The cattlemen know that in those

miles of parched grass lies more wealth than is dug from all the gold mines of the continent. The Sahara is well known as a desert. It is a synonym for aridity and desolation. But it has supported the Bedouin for centuries. They thrive—a pastoral people—horsemen all, breeding poets and warriors. The Bedouins are no mean race, either in peace or war. Men and great deeds do not flourish in a vacuity. The deserts of every land have their people and their uses—and their oases.

Wally Biggar had ridden many miles south from a small town squatting between a railroad and a river, the boggy Milk. He had crossed an undulating waste that day, where no house stood, nor fence ran. Wild cattle and wilder horses grazed in scattered herds as far as the eye could reach. He stood now looking down upon a pleasant greenness in the heart of a sun baked world. A green and lovely spot because he—and his father before him—had striven to make it so.

The Beauchamp heads in a region of flat land. Small channels, spring fed, converge, become a creek, deepen and widen to a little valley. For miles that valley runs, a trough sunk below the general level. And then the Beauchamp narrows to a gut twisting through the Bad Lands that fringe the north side of the Missouri.

Wally looked down upon his home. The Circle B house had walls of peeled pine logs, weather bleached to gray. Its shingle roof glowed like a flame with scarlet stain. Willow and aspen and solitary gnarly limbed cottonwoods lined the creek bank. Alfalfa made emerald splashes where the waters of the Beauchamp irrigated Wally Biggar's fields of winter hay.

Away west the Little Rockies thrust saw toothed peaks into a brilliant sky. As far east the humpy outline of the Larb Hills stood out in purple—enormous bluish beehives on the horizon.

"No, sir," Wally suddenly said aloud. "No damned blattin', smellin' sheep is goin' to spoil my range. No, sir."

There had never been anything in the nature of brotherly love between Wally and J. B. When Old Man Biggar came to the Beauchamp with two hundred cows, ten horses and a covered wagon, Wally was a slim herd boy. J. B. was five years older, a thick shouldered, able youth. The buffaloes were not all gone then. The Gros Ventres from the west and the Sioux from Dakota, Crows from the Yellowstone, Blackfeet from the upper Marias, still sent out scalping parties. White men rode in pairs or companies. They built their ranch-houses bullet proof and kept plenty of ammunition on hand. There were stressful times when they needed both. Still, most of them survived and flourished, bred families. In the truest sense they won the wilderness. Like others, Old Man Biggar had worked and planned and fought, and had come to think well of the fruits of his industry.

He died finally, in his own ranch-house, two years following the death of the mother of his sons. He had done well and he was content to take his last breath in his own bed, with honeysuckle and roses smelling sweetly under the window. And he left Wally to carry on in the old, free handed tradition.

Long before that J. B. had withdrawn from the family compact. J. B. had no sentiment about anything. He was energetic and enterprising, but to him a horse or a cow or a piece of land meant so much material value, so many dollars. The Circle B grew like Jack's beanstalk. But there came a time when it wilted. Markets fell. A hard winter decimated its herds. J.B. said there was more money in sheep than cattle anyway, and why not use the range for sheep. The storm this brought on him from his father and brother disrupted the Biggar alliance. J. B. could not comprehend their sentiment, their attitude. He had no sentiment whatever, and his attitude was that whatever proved profitable should be undertaken forthwith. Neither Wally nor his father had words adequate to express their feelings. They were cattlemen.

Sheep, to them, were a low form of life.

So James Benton Biggar got his share out of the Circle B. His father was a fair man. He estimated that J. B. was entitled to a fourth. He borrowed enough cash to give his son that sum, and J. B. went off to the Judith Basin, where sheep had won the range from cattle, and started in business for himself.

He did well, too. In the next decade he made far more money out of sheep than the Circle B made out of cattle. He got his finger in the State political pie. Wally held on to the old ranch. Old-timers among the cattlemen respected J. B's acquisitive ability, but they all preferred Wally's company. When they gathered in Helena for the winter, J. B. never got more than mere politeness from the cattle crowd. They did not like him. None of them cared two whoops about his numerous flocks or his bankroll. He just did not belong. Wally Biggar did. He would still have belonged if he had gone broke and become a forty dollar cowpuncher.

WALLY thought about that as he rode down the bank and into his own dooryard. Fences enclosed meadows above and below, but the Circle B proper lay open to the range. Stock could drift through, wagons and riders come and go without let or hindrance, except for a plot of grass and garden and a few shade trees surrounding the house within a picket fence that was half split pine and half shed elk antlers. Wally and his father had gathered those antlers in the old days when elk were as numerous as cattle were now. They shone whitely above the green lawn grass.

Wally clanked into the mess room, where his cook fed him grub and gossip. Thence he wandered over to the bunkhouse to smoke a sociable cigaret with his men, and also discuss something with his second in command, one Mark Fromme. His eye, upon entering, fell upon a long unseen but wholly familiar figure, which rose to shake hands.

"Hello, Puzzleface," he greeted. "So you're back in God's country? Where you been?"

"Idyho 'n' around," Puzzleface replied. He sat down by Wally and Mark on a bunk. "I come through the Judith country recent. Crossed the Missouri yesterday, an' rode up the Beauchamp."

Wally nodded. Mark Fromme was looking at him with a peculiar sort of intentness. Puzzleface Morton seemed a trifle uneasy.

"Tell him what you seen down the Beauchamp," Mark said. "I ain't had a had a chance to tell him yet."

"Why I didn't see nothin' much," Puzzleface replied. "Coupla bands of sheep."

"I expect," Wally said, "them was J. B's sheep. I hear he's got some goin' through this country."

Puzzleface snorted.

"Goin' through? Yeah, the way a mower goes through a meadow. They looked to me like they was located permanent. They're buildin' a regular ranch."

"No." Wally shook his head. "You're plumb mistaken, Puzzleface. That sheep camp may be there for a spell. But it ain't permanent."

Wally motioned Mark Fromme out into his private quarters. They seated themselves in chairs by an open window. The sun was gone. Crickets chirped shrilly in the evening hush. Honeysuckle gave off a fragrance under the window.

"You give me leave an' I'll attend to this," Mark said at last. "The boys ache to move them sheep. I knew them two bands pulled in on the Beauchamp while you was in Malta. But Puzzleface tells me they're ferryin' thousands of J. B's sheep at the mouth of the Judith."

Wally nursed his chin in one hand. He had been a fair skinned boy. As a man his face was burned to a brick red, out of which looked a pair of very blue eyes, deceptively mild. He seemed to be seeing something far off, something upon which he was very intent. But Mark knew he had heard, and waited.

"If he gets a foothold here he'll swamp the Circle B," Wally observed finally.

"That's what he figures to do. He's been waitin' his chance a long time. So I guess it's up to me to protect myself."

"If you don't, who the hell will, I'd like to know?" Mark Fromme replied.

"I'll take a ride down there in the mornin'," Wally reflected.

Mark nodded. He knew his boss.

"Put Puzzleface to work if he wants," Wally said.

The foreman took himself off. Wally laid aside some of his clothes and put on a pair of old slippers. But he did not go to bed for a long time. One cigaret after another made a ruby spot in the dark by that open window. And though his lips made no sound, Wally cursed fervently his brother and sheep and sheepmen.

"The darned critters stink and they're noisy and stupid," he muttered at last. "So does them that owns 'em and tends 'em. No self-respectin' animal can thrive where they are. And they're not goin' to stay here."

Whereupon he turned into his blankets.

CHAPTER II

THAT BUSINESS ON BEAUCHAMP CREEK

THE CIRCLE B had finished spring roundup a week earlier, celebrated the Fourth of July becomingly in Malta, lay now in comparative idleness at the home ranch during the interim before beef gathering started. Two or three rough riders were gentling broncs for fall riding. The rest loafed. There were at least nine active and enterprising young men on that ranch, exclusive of Wally Biggar and Mark Fromme, with nothing to do but wonder what the boss was going to do about this woolly invasion and when he would start doing it.

They knew all about Colonel J. B. Biggar, all about the origin of the Circle B. It was part of the range history of Montana. They rather looked for and welcomed some excitement. And Wally knew they were waiting for a lead. Sheep annoyed the cattleman, primarily because sheep ruined good range, thus affecting his material interests. But the cowpuncher, with no material interests beyond his job, despised sheep and sheepmen as inferior, as men on horseback have always despised the lowly who go afoot. Many a sizable ruction grew out of those partly aesthetic, partly sentimental attitudes of cowpunchers and sheepherders. One despised, the other resented. Upon occasion they forced the owner's hand.

Only in this case no one needed to force Wally Biggar's hand. His brother was attending to that. There was more in it, Wally knew, than J. B's material interests. There were other regions where he could pasture his expanding flocks without sending them to pollute a range his father had opened up and which his brother had held unmolested for years.

So Wally thought as he rode down the creek next morning. J. B. wanted his sheep to graze on virgin grass and pure water — every sheepman did — but he wanted more to overrun the Circle B range because he had never been able to have his own way there, in youth or in manhood. And J. B's own way was his greatest pleasure. He had squashed a good many small fry in his expanding operations. Now he was going after big game—and the Circle B was just about the biggest game in sight. Wally had been trying to convey that to Ches Williams and Tuck Munger. If Colonel J. B. could make his sheep stick on the Circle B range, he would pass over the Half Moon and the Star and Compass like a prairie fire. To a couple of old-timers who owned nearly sixty thousand cattle between them, that was a joke.

But it seemed no joke to Wally when he rested his horse on a ridge looking into the Beauchamp, and saw two bands of wethers scattered out to graze on both sides of the creek. There they were, a total of probably seven thousand grayish blots on a landscape yellow under the July sun. It was an accomplished fact—like a householder coming downstairs with a candle at midnight to find a burglar with the family silver tucked under his

arm. It seemed to Wally, as he sat half turned in his saddle, that he could hear J. B's arrogant voice saying:

"Well, I got as much right to run sheep there as you have to run cattle. It's Government grass. What you going to do about it?"

"I'll show you what I'll do about it," Wally gritted.

He could smell the strong ammoniacal odor of those sheep, borne upon a southerly breeze. It overpowered the sharp smell of the pines that stood in tiny growths through the Bad Lands not so far below. It completely destroyed for Wally Biggar the natural beauty of that scene. And it was beautiful. The plains ended like the wash of a lake against a rugged shore. The Bad Lands began where the plains ended. For thirty miles south to the Big Muddy, for another thirty miles south from the Big Muddy a geologic nightmare bared to the unmoved heavens, torn and twisted cañons with varicolored walls, with gray and dark green patches that were areas of sage and clumps of scrub pine. Along narrow benches ripe bunch-grass made streaks of pale, shimmering gold. Riders went into that maze; no wheeled vehicle could traverse it. Away beyond the river, the Moccasins, Snowies and the farther Belts —miniature mountain ranges—stood out like painted back drops on an enormous stage, they were so blue and silver tipped in that crystal air.

Curlews and long billed plover cried as they wheeled above him. A swarm of black hornets buzzed above their nest a few yards away. The Beauchamp muttered in its pebbly channel under fringing willows. But Wally Biggar leaned upon his saddle horn with no eye or ear for these minor details. His brick red face was set in a scowl. His eyes glowed between narrowed lids. There should have been a thousand cattle drifting in to water at this point; scarcely a hundred showed. In a week no range beast would come to drink within three miles of that sheep camp. In a year there would not be enough grass within a radius of five miles for a cow to nibble at if she desired. Sheep cropped grass down to the very roots. A prairie fire did less harm, according to the cattleman.

Brotherly consideration! Clan loyalty! Wally snorted, pulled his hat brim lower over his eyes and rode down to the camp, to view at close range this wanton trespass.

TWO SETS of low panel corrals flanked the creek. The place smelled of wool and sheep dung. He could imagine the noise when those seven thousand wethers came blatting into the pens at night.

Two sets of work horses grazed on picket. Two wagons stood by. There was a pile of lumber. Three men were working on a shack. The frame was up and they were laying the roof. Rather more paraphernalia than the ordinary sheep camp boasted stood about. A pile of barbed wire in tight spools added fuel to the slow anger that burned in Wally Biggar. Barbed wire was another evil the sheepman brought into the cattle country. That meant fenced water holes, closed creek bottoms in the heart of an open open range.

"Who's boss of this outfit?" Wally asked.

One man on the roof paused, with shingle nails sticking out of his mouth like iron porcupine quills. He pointed to another sawing a board. This one stopped his work to gaze up at Wally. He was past middle age, weatherbeaten. His natural expression seemed to be a bellicose scowl. He was armed. So were the other two.

"These two sheep bands belong to Colonel J. B. Biggar?" Wally inquired.

The man stared at Wally half a minute before he replied curtly—

"They belong to Emerson and Biggar."

"I know J. B. Biggar," Wally said evenly. "Who's Emerson?"

"I'm Emerson," the older man answered. "Laramie Jack Emerson—Colonel J. B's partner. Ever heard of me?"

"I ain't interested in horrible details," Wally snapped. "I just wish to remark that this is a poor location for a sheep ranch. They'd do better in the Judith where they belong."

"I reckon they'll do well enough here," the sheepman said. There was a defiant spitefulness in his tone.

"Sheep have grazed through this territory goin' an' comin'," Wally said quietly, "and nobody has cared. But no sheep outfit has ever located here."

"This one has," Laramie Jack snapped. "What you got to say about it? Who the hell are you anyway? You got a few mangy cows rangin' here? Well, listen. This is a free country. There was a time when cow outfits could tell a sheepman to move an' he moved. But them days is past."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," Wally grinned. "There's three pretty big cow outfits within a day's ride of here. No sheepman has ever got a foothold in this territory yet."

The man on the roof spat the nails out of his mouth long enough to say—

"They may be big, but they ain't bigger 'n Biggar." He grinned wide at his own witticism.

"Bigger 'n Biggar," Wally repeated under his breath. That particular play on the family name was new to him.

"Well," he said slowly, "a man may be as big as J. B. is and not get bigger."

But the pun Wally intended was lost upon his audience because they did not know him for Colonel J. B's brother. They took him literally, with shrugged shoulders. And Wally wheeled his horse and rode away. He would not waste breath in windy argument. All three looked like hard men. The ordinary citizen did not do simple carpenter work with his six-shooter belted on. Wally had heard of Laramie Jack Emerson. He pondered on the Emerson-Biggar combination as he loped out around the two bands of grazing sheep. Each herder leaned on a rifle instead of a staff. And that too, was scarcely the habit of sheepherders on their native heath.

"He's sent this bunch in here more or less expectin' trouble," Wally said to himself. "Well, I wouldn't want to disappoint my own brother."

He was back at the Circle B for the noon meal. When they filed out of the mess room Wally called Puzzleface Morton aside.

"Saddle your private ridge runner," said he, "and amble west to the Judith Crossin' of the Missouri. Size up what sort of a layout and about how many sheep J. B. is movin' in on us with."

"Got you," Puzzleface said laconically.

Ten minutes later he disappeared over the west bank of Beauchamp.

WALLY watched him go. Puzzleface had a hard reputation, which he did not quite deserve. His appearance was against him, as were his habits. He had a face like a gargoyle. One eye looked south and the other west. He was not a tidy man. He was not even what was termed a steady man. One season in a place was about all Puzzleface could stand. Then he drifted off to new country. To certain places he would return when the spirit moved. And the Circle B was one of those places. He was damnably efficient, and loyal with a curious dog-like fealty. Wally always put him to work when he turned up, whether he needed him or not. Wally had good men around him, but nobody quite like Puzzleface Morton, who saw everything, knew everything that went on, and never talked about anything unless he was asked by some one who had a right to know.

Wally himself hooked a team of fast horses to a light buggy and drove to Malta. He spent the next forenoon sending and receiving telegrams. Then he took a train to Glasgow, the county seat, where he transacted considerable business in the land office. When he had made the complete circle to the home ranch, Puzzleface was there to report.

"There's three bands of ewes an' lambs, about three thousand to each

band, movin' down along the south side of the Little Rockies," Puzzleface stated. "There's a herder an' tender for each band. There's two four horse teams with ranch supplies. An' another dude camp outfit on the side. J. B. himself is comin' along."

"You sure of that?" Wally asked.

"I'm not ridin' a Circle B horse," Puzzleface explained. "None of them sheepmen know me from Adam's off ox. Colonel J. B. don't recollect me. I'm huntin' stray horses, see? I stop in at their camp for to eat. I come back an' stay with 'em overnight. I listen to 'em talk. I ask a question or two. I don't make no mistake about Colonel J. B. He's along, personal."

"With a bodyguard of nine thousand sheep," Wally observed. "Well, we'll give him a proper welcome, maybe."

"I've seen cow country," Puzzleface grumbled, "where this here wool an' mutton on the hoof would go back the way they come talkin' more or less excited to theirselves."

"I don't reckon they'll linger around here too awful long," Wally said thoughtfully, whereat Puzzleface brightened.

"The boys are rearin' to go," he remarked hopefully.

"Let 'em rear," Wally grunted. "I'll let 'em know if there's goin' to be any Wild West."

Wally was tired from his journey. He loafed about the house that afternoon, pondering. He went to bed early. Before he turned in he made up his mind that he would have to take the initiative, move up to meet J. B. and his advancing herds, serve notice on him peacefully to stay off the Circle B range, more particularly off Beauchamp creek. If the colonel persisted there would be a ruckus. Somebody was bound to get hurt.

And if J. B. did not win in a range fight, he could not win at all. Wally doubted whether the gallant political colonel could hire enough gunmen to whip the Circle B, and he could not win a legal scrap in the courts—not in Wally Biggar's country, a cattleman's stronghold. Wally closed his eyes with the comforting reflection that J. B. would probably find that he had bitten off more than he could chew. But a sheepman never did have any sense anyway. If he did, he would not be in the sheep business. A man raised in a cow country ought to be sort of particular how he made his money.

Thus Wally Biggar. He would ride down the Beauchamp with his men on the way to meet J. B. and give Laramie Jack forty-eight hours to get those two bands off that range. If they lingered— Well, there were precedents for such situations.

But Wally did not reckon with his men. He did not realize that Mark Fromme and the Circle B riders, as loyal to him as the vassals of a feudal baron ever were to a kindly lord, had been discussing the situation more or less heatedly among themselves for days. He did not dream that they figured he hated to start a scrap with his brother; nor that they regarded Colonel J. B. as pretty lowdown for trying to establish sheep on Wally's recognized range; nor that they talked about taking matters into their own hands, reckoning that he might hesitate to order them into action, but would be relieved if they did act. Nor did Wally, going to bed early, hear a rider clattering in, nor see the man with blood streaming from a bullet crease across his shoulder, stand in the middle of the bunkhouse floor in the lamplight, unburdening his soul with a profane description of what had befallen him.

So that when Wally, who was naturally an early bird, and who had gone to sleep with the sun, rose also with that round, hot sphere, he found the Circle B completely deserted save for two ranch hands snoring in the bunkhouse and the cook laying a breakfast fire.

THE MEN were gone. Their stabled mounts were gone. Their saddles were gone. Most of them had rifles of one sort and another hung on pegs along the bunkhouse walls. When Wally remarked the absence of all this armament, knowing the

psychology of the cowpuncher, he began to suspect. A bloody handkerchief on the bunkhouse floor puzzled him. But there was no one to shed light on his darkness.

"Funny, all right," the cook remarked. "But they'll turn up for grub," he concluded, out of a vast experience in feeding hungry range riders.

Wally swallowed a cup of coffee, saddled a horse and rode south. Five miles down the Beauchamp he spied a body of horsemen riding north. Presently they met.

He gazed at them, shrewdly estimating. They were tired. Sweat stood in gray streaks on their ponies' flanks. One had a bandaged arm. Another's shirt was all bloody about the shoulders. Yet they sat their horses easily, and gazed at him with the bland satisfaction of men who feel that something worthwhile has been accomplished.

"What in hell you fellers been up to?" he demanded.

Mark Fromme winked at him.

"What you don't know won't hurt you, Wally," he said. "Me an' the boys been doin' a little range work, that's all."

"Gosh darn your hides," Wally protested. "I didn't tell you to go skin my cats for me."

"Course you didn't," one laughed. "We just went. You can fire us if you like, old-timer."

"You be damned," Wally replied feelingly. "Maybe I'll fire the whole kit and boilin' of you some day. But not right now. Go on to the ranch and get your breakfast. Puzzleface, you linger a minute."

When the others were out of hearing he said—

"Now, what come off?"

Puzzleface told him frankly, with considerable detail. Jerry Myers had been abroad looking for one of his pet horses that had strayed from the remuda. He was running a bunch of wild mares and his course took him thundering along the fringe of one band of sheep. Whereupon, the herder, taking it for granted that this was a deliberate attempt to frighten and pile up his sheep, unlimbered his musket and pinked Jerry in the arm.

"The boys been stewin' a lot anyhow," Puzzleface declared. "When Jerry come in foamin' at the mouth they just decided to go out an' clean house without troublin' you for instructions. Them fellers realize you're in a hard situation, Wally—J. B. bein' your brother."

So they swooped down on the Emerson-Biggar sheep camp with a big silver moon to light them. And there was no sheep camp now, or any bands of sheep grazing quietly along the Beauchamp.

"Where are they? What about them herders an' camp tenders?" Wally demanded.

Puzzleface waved a hand expressively.

"Scattered from hell to breakfast," said he. "Wolves 'n' coyotes'll do the rest."

"There was some gun play." Wally frowned. "Jerry and Babe Neelands were both nicked. What about the sheep crowd? I don't like the idea of killin'."

"There was some shootin'," Puzzleface admitted. "Them wasn't peaceful *hombres*. They drawed first blood, unprovoked. But we didn't kill none of 'em. We rounded 'em up an' took their guns an' told 'em to travel far an' fast. All but one old feller. He croaked himself. He was smokin' us up. The breech of his gun blowed back an' took the top off his head. So they told us when it was all over. We buried him decently."

"All right. Go on home," Wally instructed.

He rode straight down the Beauchamp till he came to the scene of the midnight fracas. His men had done a thorough job. They had drawn the camp wagons beside the new shack, piled the wooden panels of the sheep pens and everything else movable over wagons and house. All that remained was a smoldering pile of ash, hot twisted irons, tangles of barbed wire where the spools had uncoiled in the flame. There was nothing more but a vile odor of sheep and that new grave by some willows.

Wally frowned over that. Still, if the man shot and the breech blew back . . .

Anyway, the offensive trespassers were removed. The end, from a cattleman's point of view, justified the means—any means. Wally himself would have gone about it in a slightly different way, but the end might have been the same. He had been getting ready. For years, regarding the whole course of the Beauchamp as his own peculiar territory, he had neglected to acquire legal control of land and water rights. But he had both now. He had been preparing a real surprise party for Colonel J. B. He had grounds for repelling invaders.

And the war was already on. He stared out across the Bad Lands. Scattered from hell to breakfast. Too bad—for J. B. Seven thousand marketable sheep.

Then he turned and rode briskly up the creek. Since his over enthusiastic riders had started the ball, he decided to keep it rolling. There would be an aftermath to this night raid—as soon as the first sheepherder got to where he could tell his tale. So it behooved him to move fast. State troops had been known to appear upon the scene of these private wars before either side could win.

Wally's haste, however, was not so great that he could not turn aside. In a shady hollow opening off the Beauchamp, a wild strawberry patch lay hidden. Ever since he was a youngster Wally had paid annual visits to that hollow. There should still be a few ripe berries, morsels of sweet scarlet hiding amid a tangle of green leaves.

He came to the brink of this shady nook abruptly, the hoofs of his horse noiseless upon the turf. And he pulled up in amazement. A woman crouched on her knees in the strawberry patch, bent over, fingering the vines. He could see the blue and white pattern of her print dress. He could see the sheen of her bare head, yellow like gold, like a little patch of captured sunshine.

To Wally Biggar's certain knowledge the nearest woman lived thirty-five miles away and only two within that radius—both of whom he knew. Neither had yellow hair. Women did not wander alone on the range, as a rule. He looked for a horse and saw none, or any sign of a camp. This slender figure might have dropped from the sky.

And while he stared in wonder the woman lifted her head, looked at him, a silent horseman on the low bank above.

She scrambled to her feet, ran like a startled deer for a clump of service-berry bush a little way up the draw.

CHAPTER III

MARY EMERSON

WALLY jumped his horse down the bank. He did not stop to think. He acted upon pure instinct. He knew without reflection that she was frightened and he wanted to assure her that she had nothing to fear.

When he came thundering in between her and that screen of brush she stopped short, faced him with her hands clasped to her breast. She was about twenty, Wally reckoned, and she was by long odds the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. He had observed blond women, natural and otherwise, here and there, but he had never before seen a girl with hair like spun gold, the pink and white skin of healthy youth, and black eyebrows arching like penciled ebony over eyes of true violet. So it was no wonder he stared. In a lifetime on the range he had never encountered an apparition quite like this.

Who was she? What was she doing alone in a sequestered hollow picking and eating wild strawberries scarcely an hour after sunrise? But he did not blurt out those queries. Her breast heaved under her hands. She stared up at him like a hunted thing. Her fingers were stained a rosy pink with strawberry juice. Wally doffed his hat and found his voice, with a friendly grin.

"Lady, I ain't no outlaw, nor a rustler, nor anything but a respectable citizen ridin' around in the cool of the mornin'. You don't need to be scared. You're as safe here as if you were in church. You

don't have to run away from me. Don't let me spoil your strawberry pickin'."

The panic died out of her eyes.

"I was hungry," she said. "I haven't had any breakfast and there's no chance of getting any. It did scare me when I looked up and saw you standing there. I just ran without thinking."

"My Lord," Wally sympathized. "You mean you got no outfit of any kind around here? You lost or somethin'?"

"Not exactly lost," she said. "But I might as well be."

That cryptic answer puzzled Wally Biggar. He rather fancied directness in speech as well as action. But he was not dull, as regards inferences, either.

"Well," he said kindly. "If you'll tell me what the trouble is I might be able to do somethin' about it."

The girl's eyes filled.

"My uncle is in partnership with Colonel J. B. Biggar," she told him straightforwardly. "We moved in on this creek below here a few days ago with two bands of sheep. Last night a gang of cattlemen burned our camp up, ran off the herders, scattered the sheep and killed my uncle."

"Well, for the land's sake!" Wally exclaimed.

His shocked amazement was genuine. He had not and could not associate a vision like this with that sheep camp, Laramie Jack and Colonel J. B.—with any sheep outfit in fact. If handling cattle on the range was essentially a masculine pursuit the sheep business was even more so. Nobody ever associated a woman with a sheep camp.

So his conscience gave him a twinge. Nevertheless the instinct of self-preservation still functioned.

"Gosh darn it," he replied. "I'm a cattleman myself, but I don't go around committin' arson an' murder as an evenin' pastime. Who were these parties that raided your camp?"

"I don't know," she answered. "It was moonlight, but I couldn't see their faces. I only saw what happened. I ran away and hid after they killed him. They buried him, too, and then burned everything up."

"That's a kinda tough deal," Wally said gently. "You mean to say these night ridin' hounds shot your uncle an' then planted him after they'd cleaned up the camp?"

"Well—" The girl hesitated. "They didn't exactly shoot him. He was trying to stand them off and his gun blew back. But they just the same as murdered him. He had a right to defend his camp. What business has a cattleman to attack us as if we were wild Indians? It's always that way. I hate cowmen. They think they own the earth."

There were no tears in her eyes now, nor in her voice. It was quickened with emotion, with anger.

WALLY did not take issue with that. Only he privately thought Laramie Jack Emerson a double damned fool for bringing a girl on a sheep raid into what was bound to be hostile territory. He chalked up another score against J. B. But he was chiefly concerned with the predicament of this girl, whose name he did not even know. She had had a rough deal and he was very sorry for her.

"These things are darned unfortunate," he said. "You oughtn't to be made to suffer over a ruckus between cowmen and sheepherders. I'm a great believer in mindin' my own business, but I expect I'll have to look into this. Colonel J. B. happens to be my brother."

"Oh," she cried. "That's why there's a sort of familiar air about you. That's it. Oh, I hope you get after these men and hang them all."

So she knew J. B. And she did not know that as brothers they were like flint and steel, fire flying at every contact. She thought that even though a cattleman, he would stand by his own blood. Wally let it go at that.

"If your outfit's wiped out," said he gravely, "you have no place to stay for the time bein'. Best thing you can do is to come along to my place until this

business is looked into. If there's goin' to be a sheep and cattle war, it's not goin' to be a woman's affair. You can't stay here and live on wild strawberries anyway."

"No," she agreed. "It wouldn't be nice."

"Can you ride?" he asked.

She nodded.

Wally swung down. Preferring comfort and having the pick of two hundred saddle horses, he rode only even tempered, well broken beasts.

"Climb aboard Chief," he said. "It's too far to walk."

"If it's too far for me it's too far for you, in high heeled riding boots," she said from the saddle when Wally gathered up the reins to lead the horse. "Won't he carry double?"

"Sure," Wally admitted.

A curious feeling of embarrassment seized him for a moment. He could not resist a little fling.

"If you hate cowmen so bad you don't want one breathin' in your ear for ten miles."

"That isn't nice of you," she replied soberly. "You can't be like the cowmen where I've lived. I've seen them terrorize a whole neighborhood. You don't look like that sort of a man. Besides, you're Colonel J. B's brother. I don't want to make you walk."

Nor did Wally want to walk. So before she changed her mind he put his foot into the stirrup and heaved himself up behind the cantle. It annoyed him exceedingly to be classified as a "good" cattleman because he happened to be J. B's brother; or perhaps because he was a cattleman with a brother in the sheep business, and therefore probably not wholly prejudiced against sheep. Privately Wally had always considered that neither J. B. nor his business was any credit to the Biggar family.

He did not tell her that, however. He did not talk much at first. He gazed at the nape of a very white, smooth neck until he was stricken with what seemed to him an unseemly idea—namely, that it would be very pleasant to kiss that neck just where the wavy yellow hair turned up into a shining roll. He knew that was an idiotic notion to come to him upon such a short acquaintance.

So he began to consider practical matters. His men, if not by his order, at least in his interests, had burned this young woman out of house and home, contributed to the death of her uncle, and terrified her with their midnight raid. She must have been frightened. She must feel pretty hostile about it. If she ever found out the truth of the matter—Well, Wally could see where his hospitality and assistance would not be appreciated so much. Any offer to help her, and he could not help wanting to help her, would get a very black eye.

"Gosh darn it, I'm gettin' plumb foolish," Wally thought angrily. "I can give this yellow haired *dulce* a hand without goin' batty about her, I guess. Women like her got no business in a sheep camp, nohow."

Aloud he said:

"Might as well get officially acquainted. My name's Wally Biggar."

"Mine's Emerson, Mary Emerson," she replied. "Didn't you say you had a cattle ranch?"

"Uh-huh. I own the Circle B on the upper Beauchamp. Didn't J. B. ever mention it to you? Or do you know him much?"

"Oh yes, I know him quite well," she said.

"Like him?" Wally asked.

"He's quite a big man, in many ways," she answered noncommittally.

"I know all about his size," Wally grunted. "Me and J.. B. was practically raised on this ranch you're headed for. Our dad was one of the first white men to locate in this part of Montana."

"Oh," she said. "I didn't know that. The colonel never mentioned that. Isn't it a shame your own brother couldn't send his sheep into his own country without being attacked as if he were an enemy?"

Wally did not protest. He was not a sentimental man, but this girl's nearness

troubled him. J. B. *was* an enemy. Any sheepman thrusting into that range did so at his peril. To Wally his brother was a renegade. But he did not want to make that an issue with Mary Emerson. If she chose to regard cattlemen with the same hostility he had for sheep, she probably did not know any better. But J. B. knew better.

"I'll leave her take it easy at the ranch till she figures what she wants to to do," he thought. "Meantime, I'll head off J. B. If they get together and compare notes, my goose is cooked, and the boys will get into darned serious trouble."

WHEREUPON he changed the conversation for the rest of the way, and eventually the Circle B riders loafing about the ranch-house talking over the outcome of that moonlight raid with a good deal of satisfaction, were treated to the spectacle of their employer riding up to the door with an extraordinarily good looking young woman in the saddle before him. They stared. In fact they gaped. Most of them had an eye for attractive femininity. They instantly perceived that this was what they termed a prize package. That did not lessen their astonishment. Young women did not appear in the heart of the cow country unheralded, as a rule.

"Boys," Wally announced loudly, "this is Miss Mary Emerson. Her uncle was in charge of that sheep outfit we heard had moved in on the Beauchamp. Last night some bunch of skunks lit on their camp and wiped it out, her uncle gettin' killed in the raid. She had to take to the brush herself. She's goin' to stay here till she gets her bearin's. You fellers happen to know if these other cow outfits has been talkin' hostile about these sheep?"

He winked at them over Mary's shoulder and the riders caught his drift. But they did not say anything, lacking their natural fluency in the face of this apparition and Wally's statement—which conveyed to them a great deal more than Mary Emerson could possibly surmise. They lifted their hats and grunted unintelligible greetings, but they had no information to impart. They gave an excellent demonstration of extreme shyness and embarrassment.

So Wally showed her into the house, took her into what had been his mother's room. Old Mrs. Biggar had ideas about comfort and decoration which she carried out when the Circle B grew prosperous. She had passed away several years before but her room remained pretty much as she left it—a woman's room. Wally apologized for the dust. It was seldom occupied.

"You can make out here though, I guess, till you get straightened around," he said, not quite sure himself what he meant by getting straightened around. The straightening out process lay mostly in his own affairs, he suspected. And Mary Emerson, he had a feeling, added to the complications.

"We may be wild and woolly cowmen, but most of us was raised by women. Spud, the cook, he's got a family in town. You just make yourself to home here."

Mary looked at the old fashioned oak bed, the carpeted floor. She walked to the window. It was framed in honeysuckle and Virginia Creeper. A lusty rose bush with a few belated buds opening shed a faint perfume. Green grass flourished all about the house, its velvet pile shorn smooth and shaded by Lombardy poplars. Maybe the girl was struck by the contrast between that cool bit of garden and the bald, hot plains. Perhaps she made a comparison between a cattleman's home and a razed sheep camp. She looked thoughtful, a little sad. Whereupon Wally left her somewhat hastily because he got the impression she was going to cry, and partly because he had a good deal on his mind.

He beckoned all his riders into the bunkhouse. He looked over Jerry Myers and Babe Neeland, wearing stained bandages upon head and shoulder.

"Babe, you and Jerry sure are incriminating evidence," said he. "If this girl

sees a couple of men around here that's been hurt she's apt to tumble. Them scratches of yours'll heal up without you goin' to town. But you got to lay around her till you can take off them bandages. Now we got to watch out. This girl knows J. B. She's Laramie Jack's niece, and Laramie and J. B. were partners in this undertakin'. She don't love cowboys nor cattle owners, I'm here to tell you. If her and J. B. get together and compare notes, they'll have the goods on us for last night's work. That was her uncle you fellers was kind enough to bury. She lay in the brush and watched you. Lucky she couldn't see either a face or the brand."

They shifted uneasily. Women were a complication in such matters. They were all aware of that.

"Well, what you goin' to do about it?" Mark Fromme inquired.

"Do about it?" Wally echoed. "Shucks, you don't think I'm goin' to weaken at this stage of the game, do you? That camp and them sheep's wiped off the Beauchamp. I aim to head off J. B. before he gets another foothold. We'll move this afternoon. Get the chuck wagon and your own outfits organized."

There was forthwith a great deal of hurried preparation. Wally detailed one rider as cook for the roundup crew. He left the elderly Spud at the ranch to cook for those who remained—but chiefly to make Mary Emerson comfortable in mind and body, Spud being a fatherly person whom women and children and dogs took to at sight. The cowpunchers suspected, but only Wally knew his own motive. And he did not examine it too closely. He was not prepared to admit that he was going to trouble himself greatly about Mary Emerson, even if just looking at her gave him queer sensations.

AT THE last minute Jerry Myers and Babe Neelands rebelled against being left in a state of semi-hiding at the ranch, and joined the outfit. And shortly after noon the outfit rolled west, ten riders, a well stocked wagon, a hundred saddle horses. Six men and the cook remained at home. So did Mark Fromme, much to his disgust. Wally might be setting out to repel an invader by either force or guile, or both, but he did not forget that it was time to set a haying crew to work on those green meadows that lined the Beauchamp.

The last thing he did was to say casually to Mary Emerson:

"For the time bein', we'll be out doin' a little work on the range. I'll send word to the Vale County sheriff about this fuss. Likewise I'll send word to J. B. that his sheep camp has been raided, and where you are—if you like."

"That'll be kind of you, Mr. Biggar," she said. "I can't really stay here very long, you know."

"I don't know it," Wally grinned. "You're welcome to stay as long as you like. And if you don't like it, the boys will be glad to take you wherever you want to go. Them's my orders to Mark Fromme."

"You have a beautiful place here," she said abruptly.

"Sure is," Wally agreed.

He was sitting on a deep chested black horse, looking over the picket fence. The black rubbed his nose fretfully against an elk antler, and the girl put out her hand to stroke the beast's muzzle. Wally looked down at her quizzically.

"Make a grand sheep pasture," he said, and rode away.

Jogging after his men, stringing across ridges and draws that sloped from the Little Rockies to become gorges in the Bad Lands, Wally did a lot of pondering about Mary Emerson. She was naturally ruffled and indignant about that midnight raid. As she saw it the thing was an unjustifiable outrage. But Wally's observation did not indicate that she was bowed down with grief over her uncle's death. Maybe she was just dazed. Maybe the tie of affection between her and Laramie Jack Emerson was not particularly strong. Wally did not see how it could be.

He knew a little by hearsay about Laramie Jack. Range gossip covers a wide territory. Laramie had operated in Wyoming, always crowding in on cow ranges, clashing with cattlemen. He had not made a great success of the sheep business, but he had survived in it. Nor had he succeeded in holding the fort for J. B. An embittered old party, who liked to scrap. Probably J. B. had taken him into a limited partnership for that very reason, when he got primed to open that camp on the Beauchamp. So Wally did not grieve much over Laramie Jack. But he did wonder why old Emerson brought his niece into a camp and a region where there was bound to be trouble.

Wally was not precisely a slow thinker. Sluggish mentality does not make for success in the cow business. It drifted across his consciousness that maybe Mary Emerson was the magnet that drew Colonel J. B. to the scene in person. Wally had not hoped to find J. B. taking an active part in an undertaking of this sort. J. B. had crowded his sheep in where they had no business before now and precipitated trouble, but he had always got his fighting done by proxy, directed the operations like a good general, from quarters well in the rear.

Wally chuckled to himself as he caught up with his outfit. If J. B. really accompanied those bands of sheep that were moving up from Judith Crossing, whether he came to be in on the foray against his brother, or was lured by the very evident charm of Mary Emerson, there would be some fun.

CHAPTER IV

THE BROTHERS BIGGAR

THE CIRCLE B crossed War Bonnet and Chamineau and Painted Bank creeks that afternoon. Next morning at ten o'clock they pitched camp on the west fork of Painted Bank by a clear, cold spring. Here Puzzleface and Johnny Liggett, scouting ahead, returned to report sheep far on the horizon and a buckboard flanked by four riders coming up at good speed.

The Circle B was on a part of the range nominally the domain of the Half Moon. But since the Williams outfit had more or less scouted the idea of any serious sheep invasion, Wally was there to take the bull by the horns himself. When it was all over but the shouting, perhaps the Half Moon would wake up. So when his riders reported this advance guard bearing straight for their camp, Wally ate his dinner calmly and smoked a cigaret while he meditated.

And as he rolled a second cigaret the buckboard wheeled down into the shallow draw of Painted Bank, J. B. himself holding the reins over a pair of standard bred sorrels. The four mounted men with him were obviously not cowpunchers. But they were well armed and looked like fellows who were willing to take a chance if there was anything in it. Plenty of their ilk floated around the range country—gunmen for hire.

One look at J. B's countenance appraised Wally that he knew what had happened on the Beauchamp. Well, Wally had expected him to learn before long. Sheepherders were used to walking. The men his riders had chased in the moonlight probably knew J. B. was on the way from Judith Crossing with these other bands. They would head for their own outfit by preference. That was why the Circle B camped on Painted Bank. He expected to intercept J. B. dashing to the scene of the disaster with fire and smoke issuing from his nostrils. It was quite in keeping with J. B's character to come storming into the Circle B camp.

And here he was. But he did not seem certain of either his ground or his approach. He pulled up his team, though, and Wally walked over to greet him.

"Hello, J. B," he said. "Been a long time since you made tracks across this range. You lost, or goin' some place?"

"You know darned well where I'm going and why," the colonel growled. "Do you think you own the earth?"

"Well, I own some of it," Wally

grinned. "What's all the grouch about? Better unhitch and eat. We got beefsteak to spare. Be a change from mutton chops."

J. B. held tight rein on his restive team and pointed his buggy whip at his brother like a bent spear.

"Listen, Wally Biggar," said he. "I put two bands of sheep on the lower Beauchamp. You swooped down on 'em night before last and scattered 'em to hell. You burned up my camp and killed my partner. I'm going to make it blamed hot for you."

"You seem to be kinda heatin' yourself up," Wally drawled. "Sure, I know you put sheep on the Beauchamp. I thought you'd know better'n that, J. B. There's other outfits, you know, in Vale County with ideas about sheep. Whatever happened to your darned woolies, I had nothin' to do with it—myself. I heard something like a ton of brick fell on that sheep outfit, though. Mary Emerson told me."

J. B'S FACE changed color. He seemed momentarily to have some difficulty in his throat. But when he did speak he modified considerably his hostile tone.

"I told that darned old fool he shouldn't take her down there with him," he said. Wally detected the anxious note. "Where is she now—Mary—Miss Emerson, I mean?"

"At the Circle B home ranch," Wally said bluntly.

"At the Circle B?" J. B. sounded incredulous. "You kidnap her or something?"

"I found her wanderin' around on the Beauchamp like a lost sheep the mornin' after this raid you speak of," Wally told him truthfully enough. "She had nothin' to eat and no place to go. So I took her to the Circle B and told her to make herself at home."

"She's there now?"

Wally nodded.

His brother looked at him for a second or two. He glanced at the assembled riders, at his own men slouching in their saddles out of earshot.

"I guess I'll be getting on," he mumbled.

Wally put one toe on the hub of the buckboard wheel. He leaned forward and spoke in an undertone.

"I wouldn't put no more sheep on the Beauchamp if I was you, J. B." he said. "It ain't a sheep country. The Old Man would turn over in his grave if he knew you was tryin' to sheep out the Circle B. I don't want to have trouble with you over grazin' rights. But you can't run sheep on my range. No sheepman can—I ain't only drawin' the line at you. You're a pretty big man in your own way. But you ain't big enough to do that. You hadn't ought to be small enough to try."

J. B's eyes snapped.

"There was a time," he snarled, "when cowmen run this State. But the cowman's day is done. He can't horn everybody else aside like he used to. I'll have fifty thousand sheep grazin' in Vale County before snow flies. If you or any other cow outfit monkeys with 'em, I'll put you out of business if I have to get the State militia called out to do it. I need room. This is open range. Furthermore, somebody's goin' to hang for killin' Jack Emerson. Somebody's goin' to the pen for burnin' my camp and scattering my sheep. And I wouldn't be surprised if that somebody was you."

"There's quite a few of us," Wally grinned, "would as soon go to the pen as try to operate a cow range all cluttered up with stinkin' bands of sheep. Penitentiaries are clean and quiet. The surroundin's is superior to any sheep camp I ever saw. Well, I won't argue it with you, J. B. But you take a fool's advice—keep your sheep off the Beauchamp. I can fight you there, and I will. I own every foot of the creek from two miles above the Circle B to the Bad Lands."

"You do like hell!" J. B. grunted.

"Go look it up in the land office," Wally replied. "I'll admit I was kinda slow. But you ain't got no corner on the

brains in the Biggar family when it comes to a pinch, J. B. You stay off my ground, you and your plug-uglies, and your blattin' sheep."

"We'll see about that," Colonel J. B. said with a visible effort at self-control. "You tend to your own business, Wally Biggar, and it is not your business to tell me where to run my sheep."

"I'm merely tellin' you where you can't run 'em," Wally pointed out. "The rest of the State is open to you as far as I'm concerned. But not my range, J. B. I'm tellin' you straight. You can't make it stick."

J. B. glared at him. Perhaps he took note of those several alert looking young men standing about with patent hostility in their tanned faces. And probably he reflected that cowpunchers never needed much incitement to be high handed where sheepmen were concerned.

"If you want to make a personal war outa this you've made a good start," he said. "I'll bust you wide open before I'm through. And I'm goin' straight to your ranch and take that girl outa this country before the fireworks begin."

"Help yourself," Wally said coldly. "But before you go any farther, you better send word to them that's in charge of the rest of these sheep you're driftin' down here that they'd better graze 'em west of the Little Rockies until the smoke clears away."

"You go to blazes," Colonel J. B. said out of one corner of his mouth—very quietly so that only Wally heard.

He clucked to his team, rolled across Painted Bank and vanished over the eastern bank, his four outriders jogging at his wheels. Wally watched them out of sight. Then he called his *segundo*.

"Lay here," he ordered, "and keep track of them sheep. "If they attempt to cross this creek, turn 'em back. I dont care how you do it, so as you stop 'em. Them's my orders. Turn 'em back. *Sabe?*"

They did. They *sabed* with enthusiasm. Ten minutes later Wally was riding straight for the home ranch, flanked by Puzzleface Morton and Johnny Liggett. Johnny was the antithesis of Puzzleface, being tall and boyishly good looking. But both had one thing in common—a personal devotion to the Circle B, and a wonderful capacity for keeping things to themselves.

Wally's mind, as he rode, dwelt more or less upon Mary Emerson. He did not know how or why he established some connection between her and J. B. and this woolly invasion. But there it was. Something in the girl's tone or expression as she had talked to him about herself and Laramie Jack, about the gallant colonel; something in J. B's look and voice when he mentioned the girl, made Wally think furiously, likewise act. He pointed across country as if he were riding pony express.

Five miles from the Circle B he turned Puzzleface and Johnny Liggett off with specific instructions. Then he rode alone until he reached a point where he could look into the bed of Beauchamp, scan the entire country from the ranch, without himself being visible. From this vantage he saw J. B. drive in with his sorrel team, saw him drive forth again half an hour later—alone. Then Wally mounted and rode in at a leisurely gait about sundown.

MARY sat on the grass under a Lombardy poplar with a pink rosebud tucked behind one ear, and Wally gazed at her so intently that she finally blushed a trifle under the admiring directness of his gaze.

"Everybody treat you all right since I've been gone?" he inquired.

"Everybody's fine to me," she replied. "I'm falling in love with this place. It's—Well, it's hard to describe. It's different from any ranch I ever was on."

"We've been here a long time," Wally told her. "My dad and my mother put in a good many years and a heap of work makin' this a home."

"We never made a home, somehow," Mary said wistfully. "We made money out of sheep, but all we ever had was sheep camps. Even at a time when dad

seemed to be getting rich in Wyoming and I was away at school, he and mother always lived in camps. She died on a sheep ranch."

"I'd think you'd hate sheep instead of cattle," Wally said frankly. "There ain't no comparison between the two."

"Well, I don't know. They were always fighting my father. Uncle Jack always fought them back. I've seen cattlemen ride with their cowboys into our camps like lords of creation and tell us we had no business in their country. And it was as much our country as it was theirs," she frowned. "I ought to hate cattlemen."

"Well, I don't hate sheep men," Wally declared. "I just don't want 'em around with their flocks, that's all. They mess up a range so that it ain't fit for nothin'. Then they pass on and do the same thing elsewhere. If you was a cowman's wife or daughter you'd *sabe* why. Take this ranch and all the little creeks and valleys around here. They're sweet and clean. There's no fences, only a few hundred acres of hay land for winter feed. Everybody's stock wanders where it pleases. There's no bad smells driftin' five miles to windward, no barbed wire fences around water holes, no— Oh, gosh, I better not talk about it.

"Say, I saw J. B. this mornin'. He come down to see about this raid on his sheep camp. He said he was goin' to take you out of this country before he pried the lid off the boilin' kettle. I told him how you come here."

"Do you think he'd come here?" she asked artlessly.

"Sure. Why not? It's a free country," Wally replied. "He's my brother. I wouldn't meet him with an ax in my hand if he come here—even if he does think I burned up his camp and raised Cain with his sheep and killed your esteemed uncle."

"Oh, but you didn't," she exclaimed. "I know he thinks so. He did come here. He only left an hour or so ago. But you didn't stage that raid. You couldn't."

"Why couldn't I?" Wally asked.

"I can't imagine it," she declared. "You aren't that kind of a man."

"You don't know nothin' about what kind of a man I am," Wally Biggar said with a touch of grimness. "But if you stay around here you might find out. J. B. probably expressed his opinion of me to you. He seemed to think it was up to him to look after you. I suppose that's natural seein' you are his partner's niece."

"He doesn't need to think so," she said with considerable emphasis. "I can look after myself once I get to a railroad."

"Anytime you're plumb anxious to go, I can have one of the boys take you over to the Landusky stage line. It runs twice a week," Wally said. "What'll you do? Go back to your folks."

She shook her head.

"I haven't any that mean anything much to me," she murmured. "I don't know exactly what I'll do. It depends."

But she did not explain upon what it depended.

"Well, you don't have to be in a hurry if you got no mark you're in a rush to shoot at," he continued. "Maybe you'd as soon wait till J. B. turns up to take you out. Anyway, you're plumb welcome —even if you're in the enemy's camp."

"I know," she said. "You've made me feel that. And it's lovely and restful around this old place. But I can't stay here all summer. I have to . . . "

Her voice trailed off into an indistinct murmur. Wally made no comment. He did not ask questions. He made himself a cigaret and sat upon the grass, staring at the green shrubs and clumps of flowers in his garden. And he was conscious that now and then Mary Emerson regarded him with a look of speculative interest in her very blue eyes.

Wally sat there until the cook called him in to a belated supper. Afterward, in the gathering dusk, he talked to Mary. He told her a lot of stories about his father establishing the ranch in the old Indian days.

And after dusk, when he had withdrawn to the bunkhouse, so as not to embarrass

her, Johnny Liggett and Puzzleface came riding in.

J. B., they said, had made a camp close by the burned pens on the Beauchamp. His four hired horsemen had been scouting around in the Bad Lands, probably looking for those scattered sheep. At sundown, they said, J. B. was sitting there on a roll of blankets smoking cigars.

"Listen here," said Wally Biggar to his two men.

They put their heads together. For several minutes he talked. Both Puzzleface and Johnny nodded and chuckled, their faces wrinkled by smiles of amusement.

"Sure," they agreed. "That's a plumb brilliant scheme. That's the ticket. One way of givin' him a bellyful of his own medicine."

"Be ready to get out with me at sunrise," Wally ended. "I don't know if he'll head back here again. I kinda think from what Miss Emerson said that he will. He's got some business with her. If he don't we'll pick him up somewhere else. Take along a packhorse with plenty of grub and some extra blankets."

After which he turned into a bunk in one corner, where for a long time he lay smiling up into the dark, as if, like Johnny and Puzzleface, he saw something that tickled his fancy.

CHAPTER V

THE COLONEL LOSES A TRICK

THE THREE drew up on a ridge that commanded all the lower Beauchamp, when the sun was less than an hour high. They tightened their cinches, rolled a smoke, and kept lookout. Presently out of the bed of the creek a buckboard emerged, rolling north. Wally nodded to himself. J. B. was headed on his second visit to the Circle B.

"He wouldn't be down in this country at all if it wasn't for her," Wally reflected. "He'd do his fightin' with hired men at long range. Well, we'll give him a touch of sheep life."

They dropped off their ridge, crossed a draw and drew up in the path of the buckboard. J. B. stopped at the sign of his brother's uplifted hand.

"Mornin'," Wally greeted. "You headed for the Circle B home ranch, by any chance?"

"I am," J. B. snapped. "What about it?"

"Head the other way," Wally said quietly.

"You go plumb to hell," J. B. replied. He clucked to his team.

But Johnny Liggett ranged alongside, and snatching one of the reins, took a turn with it around the horn of his saddle. J. B. reached under his coat, but his hand remained there. Wally and Puzzleface simultaneously threw down on him, each with a .45.

"Don't get gay and you won't get hurt," Wally told him. "Don't try monkeying with the buzz saw this mornin', J. B. Reach for the atmosphere with both hands. Quick."

J. B. reached.

Puzzleface dismounted, searched the prisoner, removed from his portly middle a neat gambler's gun — a .41 Colt. A carbine under the buckboard seat, Puzzleface emptied of cartridges. J. B. glowered and threatened, relapsed at last into silence, looking considerably perturbed.

"You drive a ways," Wally commanded.

Puzzleface got into the buckboard seat and took the reins. With Johnny Liggett on one flank and Wally on the other they bore off toward the roundup camp on Painted Bank.

But five miles west of the Beauchamp they stopped in a brushy hollow, unharnessed and turned the sorrel team loose. The buckboard they carefully concealed in the thickets.

Thereafter J. B., sullen and snarly by turns, rode on the packhorse, much like an Arab perched on the hump of a camel. In such fashion they came into sight of the roundup by mid afternoon.

"Listen, you fellers," Wally addressed his crew when they gathered about.

"We done picked up a crazy galoot loose on the prairie. He's a sheepherder, I guess, because he's ravin' about bein' a big sheep man and ownin' Vale County. He raves about some bands of sheep he's lost somewhere."

J. B. cut in with a howl of protest. Wally gazed pityingly from his seat in the saddle.

"Sure loco," he observed. "Wonder who he is and where he's from? What had we ought to do with him?"

There were at least four men in the outfit who knew Colonel J. B. Biggar by sight as well as they knew Wally. They did not know what was coming, why the boss took this peculiar tack, but being bright young men they smelled something good. They nodded gravely while J. B. threatened and swore and pleaded until he approached hysteria.

"You fellers seen any sheep?" Wally inquired.

"Why, yes," they said. "There's two, three bands grazin' along a few miles west of here."

"Then he must belong to them," Wally declared. "I expect we better restore him to his woollies. We better— Hey, grab him!"

For J. B., in a transport of impotent rage, having dismounted from the pack-horse, had made a leap for a rifle which happened to be leaning against the chuck wagon wheel.

Strong hands restrained him. He wriggled and twisted, but he was helpless. Wally got off his horse. He surveyed J. B. and shook his head sadly.

"Poor beggar's violent," he said. "That's what comes of traffickin' in sheep. We got to keep him from hurtin' hisself."

Whereupon Wally produced out of his saddle pocket a pair of shiny steel handcuffs. A deputy sheriff in search of a horsethief had left them at the Circle B months before. Wally had remembered to bring them along that morning—with a definite purpose in mind. There was also in the bed wagon a twelve foot length of logging chain. He had one of the riders bring this. Wally looped it through the wagon wheel. He snapped one clasp of the steel bracelets on J. B's right wrist. The other he ran through the links of the chain.

Thus the outraged gentleman was picketed to the wagon as if he were a performing bear tied up for the night. Whether from sheer fury or pure chagrin, J. B. ceased to revile and threaten. He sat upon a roll of bedding and regarded all and sundry, but especially his brother, with a dumb stare.

THE CIRCLE B cook prepared food for the four of them. Wally, Puzzleface and Johnny Liggett filled their plates and sat down in the grass to eat. The cook loaded a plate for J. B. When he handed it over the colonel rose at his chain end and kicked the plate out of the cook's hand. Whereupon the outfit collectively shook its head and discoursed gravely upon the peculiar actions of men who lost their reason.

Later, the entire crew saddled fresh horses. Leaving J. B. chained to the wheel, and the cook and horse wrangler in charge of the camp, Wally led the other riders due west. A little before sundown, far off on a ridge that sloped from the Little Rockies to the Bad Lands, they descried the approaching bands of sheep.

The smell of them came up on the west wind, a strong, acrid odor. The cowboys wrinkled their noses and looked at Wally Biggar. He had outlined what he proposed to do but not precisely how he meant to do it. He did not explain now.

"We'll lay low till dark. No use givin' them fellers any chance to identify us," he said.

While they waited, lying in the grass, killing time with cigarets and tall stories, Wally outlined his plan in detail. They grinned and approved, appreciating that sort of joke. They were not bloodthirsty thugs. They had no craving to kill sheepherders unless the sheepherders

staged a scrap. If they could laugh a sheep owner with several bands of sheep out of Vale County it was better than shooing them out with gunpowder—although, on the whole, they preferred the smell of gunpowder to the smell of sheep.

So entering heartily into the spirit of the occasion, when darkness fell they divided into three parties and moved stealthily down upon each band where it was bedded for the night.

Each herder had two or three keen and intelligent collie dogs. These naturally barked. But since they barked consistently at the slinking approach of wolf or coyote, the herders and camp tenders paid little attention. When they did, it was too late. They found themselves staring into the muzzles of sundry guns with no chance to reach for their own—unless they craved to commit suicide, which apparently none did.

"Take your personal belongin's and fade away," Wally told them when herders, camp tenders and the drivers of the two freight wagons were bunched in a group. "Fade far and fast and don't ever come back."

The gentle shepherd who tended flocks upon the Montana plains frequently belied his name. But in this case the surprise was too complete. They faded, escorted a mile or two by part of the Circle B. Darkness swallowed them. They walked rapidly and silently, listening to some very pointed advice from the mounted men at their heels.

The only part of their possessions Wally Biggar took liberties with was four of their dogs. He had them tied up before he drove the herders away. Since the sheepherder regards his dogs with much the same pride and affection a range rider bestows upon his horse they protested. Wally reassured them.

"Your dogs won't be harmed. They got brains and we need 'em for a few days, that's all. We'll feed 'em and take good care of 'em. Colonel J. B. Biggar'll deliver 'em to you himself at his headquarters in the Judith Basin in three weeks or so. So shut up and hit the trail."

With the bedded flocks in their hands without firing a single shot, the Circle B riders proceeded to bunch them into one enormous band—nine thousand sheep, crowding against each other, emitting a chorus of gentle bleats that rose into the dark as if from one vast throat. The riders hitched the sheep wagon horses to one camp wagon. Johnny Liggett mounted the seat and drove away into the night.

Puzzleface and five or six others started the sheep moving. Huge and unwieldy as that mass was, with the aid of the dogs and by snapping rope ends they shifted them, creeping over the rolling land as the swarms of locusts crept over the Egyptian fields. The sheep could be seen only as a dim, formless blot. But they could be heard. The sound of their bleating beat into the darkness like surf upon a distant shore. And they could be smelled—yes, to the high, star spangled heavens.

Wally and the rest of his men paused for a second before they rode away to the camp on Painted Bank.

"My gosh," one said, "no wonder sheepherders go crazy listenin' to that. You can't hear yourself think."

They loped on, dropped finally into the dusky bed of Painted Bank. Colonel J. B. was coiled in his blankets by the wagon wheel, secure on his chain. Wally found him awake, sullenly contemplating the stars.

"Get up and get your clothes on," he ordered.

"You go to blazes," J. B. snarled.

"All right. You'll ride without clothes then. Crawl outa bed before I yank you out."

For all his defiance J. B. dressed. Wally undid the chain, but he did not bestow freedom on his brother. He shackled both wrists together with the handcuffs and mounted him on a gentle horse, with the chain fastened to the saddle horn. Once more he set out across that darkened land, lying like velvet beneath the pellucid night.

HE RODE silently, leading the horse bestridden by his shackled brother up slopes and down through the gut of many a hollow. The way grew perceptibly rougher. Not wholly a stranger to that region, J. B. knew he was being led from the outer foothills down into the furrowed confusion of the Bad Lands. Perhaps misgivings smote him.

"Say, Wally," he asked at last, "you ain't goin' to do away with me or nothin' like that, are you? Where you takin' me, and for what?"

"You'll find out come daybreak," Wally replied cheerfully. "No, J. B, I don't aim to make away with you. I don't aim to harm a hair of your mule head. You'd ruin my range, sheep me outa house and home just to put it over me because you never been able to make me eat outa your hand, but I ain't gonna hurt you. Better men than you have been shot plumb full of holes for less. But I won't use you rough unless you force me to. I merely aim to give you a good bellyful of your own medicine."

Thereafter Wally refused to talk. He rode hour after hour, down into deep gorges, along steep hillsides where branches of scrubby pine raked J. B's face, through dusky bottoms where sagebrush swept their knees and the bruised leaves underfoot sent up a sweetish, pungent smell. And at last when the dawn laid a pale band along the eastern rim of the plains, Wally halted at a cabin that loomed suddenly in a saucer shaped depression carpeted with tall bunchgrass.

"Get down," he commanded.

He led J. B. into the cabin. By the light of matches he ran the loop of the chain around a log where the chinking had fallen out. Then he freed one of his brother's wrists and made the handcuff fast to the chain as before, and J. B. was again securely anchored.

Wally unsaddled, took his saddle blankets and slicker in to J. B.

"Make yourself comfortable," he said. "Might as well. You'll be here for a spell."

He found an old coffee pot standing on a rusted sheet iron stove. He filled it with water from a cold spring bubbling out of a low bank behind the cabin, and put it within J. B's reach.

Then he picketed the two horses and sat down outside with his back against the cabin wall, to watch daybreak and sunrise flood the Bad Lands with light and color.

CHAPTER VI

WALLY GOES INTO THE SHEEP BUSINESS

SIX DAYS later Wally Biggar drew up on the west bank of the Beauchamp to stare thoughtfully down at his homestead. The Circle B ranchhouse stood gray walled in the green lawn, with its flaming roof bright in the sunshine within that open space between fenced meadows. The stables and corrals lined the stream in an orderly row. Coming down from parched highlands it looked very inviting. Wally had looked at it in sun and rain and snow and it always looked good to him.

A drone of mowers rose in the fields. Hayracks loaded and hayracks empty came and went between stacks and raked windrows. Off on the opposite bank a band of wild horses had come to look curiously down upon all this activity. Like statues they stood poised, ready to gallop, buckskin and gray and dun, bays and bright sorrels. Away off, scattered in little groups, Circle B cattle grazed with the glint of sun reflected off polished horns. Down in the garden the tall Lombardy poplars shivered in a wandering breeze. His eye marked the gleam of light cloth at the foot of one.

"She ain't gone yet," he muttered to himself.

Whereupon he rode in, stabled his horse, and sauntered over to the house.

Mary Emerson sat on a homemade lounge chair with a magazine in her lap. She did not exactly flutter at Wally's approach. She did not even smile. She just looked at him. She seemed remark-

ably free from feminine artifices, so far as Wally could determine. He greeted her in a casual manner, which he did not feel. He was, in fact, a trifle uneasy. J. B. must have said a good deal to Mary Emerson. She had had a week to think things over. J. B. could be very convincing, Wally knew.

Bigger 'n Biggar! Or spell it with an "e" and a small "b". That chance phrase of Laramie Jack's stuck in Wally's mind. Confound J. B. and his sheep. It seemed simple enough originally to warn him first, and fight him tooth and nail afterward, if necessary. This quiet voiced blond girl complicated the issue. Wally admitted that to himself, without abating his determination to keep his range free from sheep—especially from J.B's sheep.

He sat down upon the grass beside her.

"The sheriff came out from Glasgow to investigate that sheep raid and my uncle's getting killed," she said abruptly. "Did you know?"

"Well, I supposed he would," Wally replied. "But I haven't seen Mark Fromme. I guess he's out in the field somewhere. I been movin' around on the range pretty steady. I haven't met any sheriffs yet."

"I told him you had nothing to do with it," she went on. "Although Colonel J. B. swears you did."

"I expect he would," Wally drawled. "J. B. always did love to have his own way. I expect you've begun to figure that him and me don't always see things quite the same way. I thought he'd been takin' you out to the railroad before now. As a matter of fact, I saw him yesterday. He's movin' a lot of sheep around south of the Little Rockies."

"I did expect him back," she said with a little frown. "I've waited a week. I can't wait much longer."

"He's a busy man," Wally smiled, thinking just how painfully busy J. B. really was, and would be for some time. He looked at Mary quizzically.

"I can take you where he is if you're plumb anxious to see him," he said. "If you're uneasy."

"I'm not uneasy, exactly," she answered. "I have nothing to do but sit and think. And the funny part is that I'm perfectly satisfied doing that."

"Well, keep right on doing it," Wally encouraged. "You're welcome to sit around here and think as long as you want to."

"And find myself a candidate for the poorhouse, or looking for a job as a waitress," she said.

"Your uncle Jack and J. B. shouldn't have mixed you up in a raid on to a cow range that has never been open to sheep," Wally said regretfully. "They shoulda knowed there'd be trouble. You oughtn't to be mixed up in no range war."

"Is that what it amounts to?" She leaned toward him. Her voice was anxious.

WALLY plucked a long blade of grass and drew patterns on his bootleg for a half minute before he replied. A meadow lark fluttered to a picket of the garden fence and began to trill his throaty song. Looking at Mary Emerson and listening to that sweet voiced bird, Wally found a curious emotion stir in his breast. He was between the devil and the deep sea—and he knew it. He liked this girl and he had thought about her much more than was good for his peace of mind since the hour he swept down upon her in the strawberry patch.

"Well, suppose it does?" he queried.

"Then I see where I lose," she murmured. "It's always that way."

"How do you lose?" he asked. "You in the sheep business personally? Or have you got a personal interest in J. B's numerous flocks?"

Mary looked at him soberly for a second before she replied.

"I haven't any interest whatever in Colonel Biggar's numerous flocks. But I have got an interest in his partnership with Uncle Jack. All the money I have in the world is tied up in that. I don't want to be a pauper. If it's going to be one of these old, bitter fights between

sheepmen and cattle owners, I might be. Is it, as you say, a range war?"

Wally frowned. Mary Emerson belonged in the enemy's camp. He was making war on her relatives, her friends, destroying her property—or he would, if it came to a showdown. And still . . .

"Yes," he admitted reluctantly, "I guess that's what it amounts to—or maybe will in the end if J. B. persists in tryin' to swamp this range with sheep. I'll fight him myself. I have to. You see this country—" He rose to his feet, and flung his arms out in a sweeping gesture. "It means more to me than just so much grass and water. You've rode across some of it. It's wide open. Everybody can come and go. The grass grows knee high in the bottoms. The creeks and springs is clean. You see this ranch, this garden and trees and flowers. My father took many a long chance to hold this location when me and J. B. were little shavers. Him and my mother worked for years to make this place what it is, when no sheepman would 'a' dared try to open up this country. The buffalo would 'a' tramped his flocks into the ground, and the Blackfeet and Sioux would 'a' scalped him and his herders just for the fun of it.

"J. B. has made money in sheep, far more than I've ever made in cattle. But money isn't everything. I think a heap of this ranch and the surroundin' range. There's other cowmen around here feel the same way. To me it's plumb beautiful the way it is. The kind of sheep operations J. B. will carry on will make it bare as the Mojave Desert in five years. Where he gets a foothold other sheep outfits will crawl in. I can't help it if they're your sheep or J. B's or anybody's. They can't range here. I been tryin' to reason with J. B. But he ain't a reasonable man, even if he is my brother."

"No, I don't suppose Colonel J. B. is a reasonable man," she said.

"I aim to be, until I'm crowded into a corner," Wally declared. "Then I'm liable to be a heap more unreasonable than he ever thought of bein'. It's news to me that you got an interest in these sheep, though. I thought they were J. B's and Emerson's. Are you in the sheep business because you like it, or because you reckon it's a good thing?"

"I wouldn't be in at all," Mary frowned, "if Uncle Jack hadn't persuaded me to let him handle my money. I wouldn't be down here if he hadn't sort of prevailed on me to come, to help out with the cooking."

"Funny I didn't see you. I was down there one mornin' and asked him what he was doin' there," Wally said. "I didn't introduce myself, because they didn't seem very hospitable."

"I suppose I was down along the creek," she said. "They told me a cowman had come in to look them over and made a few nasty remarks."

"The only nasty remarks I recall was made by Laramie Jack," Wally protested. "I'm sorry, on your account, that he got killed. But I don't really feel no sorrow on his account. He shouldn't have let J. B. rib him up to invade this country."

"I think it was perfectly terrible for any cowman to raid a camp in the night like that," Mary said. "But I've got to be honest about it, Mr. Biggar. I'd be just as sorry if any of the other men had got killed. Uncle Jack was a pretty hard man. He liked to fight. He was a good sheepman, though. He always did well with sheep except for a little hard luck here and there."

"That's probably why J. B. picked him for a partner to start in business down here," Wally told her. "I heard of Laramie Jack Emerson long before I ever saw him. J. B. probably figured Laramie was tough enough to open up this range to all the J. B. bands. If your money's in with Jack Emerson's on this sheep deal, I'm afraid you're goin' to come out loser, Miss Emerson. And I sure wouldn't like to see you, or any woman, get the worst of it in a row between men."

"What am I to do?" she sighed. "I didn't know there was the start of a range war in this move. Uncle Jack's dead, his sheep scattered to the winds.

When Colonel J. B. was here the other day he said—he said—"

"He was goin' to have the Vale County cowmen, and especially me, eatin' out of his hand, or words to that effect, I suppose," Wally observed. "Well, I dunno about that. Just how much of an interest have you got in these sheep, anyway?"

"Well—" Mary wrinkled her brows—"When daddy died two years ago he left me about four thousand dollars in cash, a half interest in some sheep and a deed to a ranch on the Judith. Uncle Jack sold the ranch and gave me the money. Then he went into partnership with Colonel J. B. They own between them—that is under the Emerson-Biggar mark—about twenty thousand head. I have a one-fourth interest in that."

WALLY could have said it in seven words—a quarter interest in twenty thousand sheep. But a woman, he reflected, always had to explain things.

"Sheep are worth in the open market an average of three dollars a head," he calculated. "Your interest is worth roughly fifteen thousand dollars. Tell you what I'll do. I'll buy you out for cash."

"If I could get fifteen thousand dollars out of it, I'd think myself lucky," Mary said. "But it wouldn't be fair. About six thousand of those sheep are scattered far and wide, and probably nearly all killed by now. You'd be loser."

"Oh, I don't reckon they'd kill 'em," Wally said. "I expect a bunch of live riders could round up a lot of them sheep. I'll take a chance on it anyway. I ain't doin' this for fun, Miss Emerson. As a live partner I can maybe head off J. B. from stirrin' up any more trouble. Lord knows I don't want no wars on this range. Will you give me a bill of sale, if I give you a check for that?"

"I will, but it doesn't seem quite like a square deal," she capitulated.

Within half an hour, after laborious clerical work on Wally's part, he owned Mary Emerson's sheep interests and she had a check for fifteen thousand drawn on a Fort Benton bank. And Wally went to bed that night chuckling to himself.

In the morning he said to Mary:

"I got to join the roundup. There's considerable work ahead of us. Now, you consider this ranch your own, as long as you want to stay. And if you make up your mind that you just got to shake the dust of this territory off your feet, Mark Fromme'll see that you get to the railroad. I'll tell him. But I'd like to see you sittin' under these poplars when I come back, just the same."

Mary looked at him with those darkly violet eyes until a tinge of color crept up under Wally's tan.

"It's funny the colonel didn't come back," she said thoughtfully. "He was positively going to come the next day and take me to town."

"Do you want him to come and take you to town?" Wally asked bluntly. "Because if he ain't left the country, I'm goin' to see him inside of forty-eight hours to tell him I'm his partner in the sheep business, and that I've got a legal say as to where and how he runs these sheep."

"No," she said. "I certainly don't want him to take me to town, or anywhere. I'd just like to tell him that he needn't bother his head about me any more."

"Well, I'm goin' to hunt him up," Wally grinned. "I'll deliver him that little speech. I'll tell him his devotion to sheep has lost him his girl."

"I'm not his girl," Mary flared up. "I'm not anybody's girl."

"You're going to be," Wally said over his shoulder, as he walked through the doorway.

He did not wait for the reply, if any. He was too astonished at his daring. Also he was subtle enough to leave her with something to think about. Also he had a pretty sizable material problem to settle before he could cope whole heartedly with an emotional one.

CHAPTER VII

COMPROMISE BY FORCE

WALLY was as good as his word. Only he did not wait forty-eight hours to deliver that message. He was gazing into the furious eyes of Colonel J. B. when that day's sun lacked two hours of setting, having ridden fast and far and straight to where J. B. toiled at a compulsory task that was both hard and hateful.

"You can't get away with this much longer," J. B. stormed. "I'll have you in the pen for murder, arson and kidnaping."

"You talk just like any crazy sheepherder," Wally said good naturedly. "I can get away with it just as long as I want to. Where's your witnesses to any crime? Why, man, I'm savin' you money! You're lookin' after your own stock, aren't you? The Circle B boys all know you're stuck here with ten thousand sheep because your herders and camp tenders got cold feet and quit the country. You got to look after these sheep, J. B. There's nobody else to do it."

For a second J. B. was reduced to a speechless glare. The late July sun had first burned and then peeled in shreds the colonel's florid face. He stood on a broad plateau with three collie dogs squatted by, pricking their sharp ears alertly. Sheep were scattered over that Bad Land plateau in a great bleating concourse. J. B. was herding those sheep with the expert assistance of the collies. He had been doing so for a week. His feet were sore from miles of walking and his heart was sore with impotent rage. He could neither fight nor run, for off on a little rise four hundred yards away, Puzzleface Morton sat comfortably in the shadow cast by his horse, keeping watch on J. B., while J. B. kept watch on the sheep.

"Man alive," Wally continued. "My riders is even goin' to a lot of trouble to round up and restore to you the remnants of them two bands some night ridin' outfit scattered on the lower Beauchamp. You ought to be plumb grateful to me. I'm really helpin' you out in spite of the fact that you started in to sheep my range to death. You've been gettin' to be a big man, J. B.—bigger 'n bigger all the time. But I don't reckon you can quite afford to lose eighteen or nineteen thousand sheep at one clatter. That's about what you've brought down into this country. And that's just about what you'll be shy if you don't look after 'em personal."

Wally stopped to roll a cigaret. He was enjoying himself.

"Furthermore," he went on, "I got a regular say about these sheep now, because I've done acquired a legal interest in 'em. You'd have a hell of a time convincin' a judge and jury—in Vale County anyhow—that I set out to destroy my own property. I'm your partner in this Emerson-Biggar sheep layout, J. B."

"You're what?" J. B. shouted, embellishing his gestures with sundry profane epithets.

Wally explained briefly.

"Hell's bells and tinklin' cymbals!" J. B. shrieked. "I'll kill you for this!"

"Tut, tut," Wally reproved. "You won't kill nothin' for a spell but an odd mosquito. You're goin' to herd our sheep —our sheep—yours and mine, J. B. You never thought we'd be partners in the sheep business, did you, J. B.? I sure didn't. But we are. I may be the junior partner, J. B., but you're goin' to be guided by my advice in handling our flocks from now on."

"How long you goin' to keep me prisoner?" J. B's tone suddenly grew less belligerent, more anxious. "Herdin' these damned sheep?"

"Till you get your bellyful of sheep," Wally replied sternly.

"But good Lord, it's criminal," J. B. wailed. "I got other things besides sheep. My business will be all shot to pieces."

"So would my business if you had your way," Wally snapped. "You should 'a' thought of that before you set out to overrun the Beauchamp. You're lucky you ain't occupyin' the same bed Laramie Jack Emerson is."

Whereupon Wally rode away to have speech with Puzzleface.

"You have much trouble with him?" he asked.

Puzzleface shook his head.

"He started overland a coupla times. I let him amble a mile or so. Then I flipped a loop over him, drug him a few rods for luck, 'n' made him trot all the way back. He's gittin' tamer every day."

WALLY turned off to the southward, dipped into the bunch-grass basin where that lonely cabin stood. The morning he brought J. B. there the grass stood over two hundred acres like a field of ripe wheat, waving and shimmering yellow in the sun. It lay tramped flat now, littered with sheep dung. The spring flowing out of the hill behind the cabin was a muddy pollution except where Puzzleface had fenced the head with pine poles.

Wally gazed with disgust at the sight. He wrinkled his nose at the pervading smell. He frowned at the camp wagon Puzzleface had driven into the camp with J. B's supplies and bedding. He had to walk forty rods to where the sheep wagon team was picketed, to get grass for his own horse. Then he sat down to wait. Here the huge band of sheep bedded down at night watched over only by the dogs. When the sun sank and the rosy afterglow tinted the dark contours of the Bad Lands, and made the distant peaks of the Little Rockies stand up like pinnacles of gold, the gray woolly mass began to pour like a flood into the basin, bleating in a chorus ten thousand strong. Through the press, when the basin was full of them, like a vast bowl of dirty gray water, Puzzleface came riding, a Winchester across his saddle fork, with Colonel J. B. walking toilsomely ahead.

J. B's town shoes were worn and soiled, his shirt dirty and badly torn. He had several days' growth of reddish brown stubble on his chin. He looked tired and Wally knew he was tired, for J. B. was a heavy man, not much used these latter years to exerting himself. Ten thousand sheep cover a lot of territory in a day's grazing. There were just three times as many sheep in that herd as any practical sheepman puts into a single band. And Puzzleface saw that J. B. kept that band from scattering. Only Puzzleface rode and J. B. walked the weary miles.

Puzzleface motioned J. B. inside. Wally sat silent, watching. Puzzleface snapped the handcuff on J. B's left wrist. He had a few feet of chain for scope and his blankets were spread on the dirt floor.

Then Puzzleface started a fire outside, boiled potatoes, fried bacon, made coffee. He loaded a plate, filled a cup and served J. B. his supper. Then he and Wally ate leisurely by the outer wall in the cooling dusk, while the numerous voices of the sheep died down to an occasional mournful bleat.

They lighted cigarets and edged over beside the open door and began to talk in low voices. But occasionally one or the other would raise his voice for a sentence or two, so that the words could be heard by listening ears within. And their conversation ranged upon various methods of disposing of ten thousand sheep and a contumacious sheepman without leaving a trace of either. Puzzleface was all for extreme measures. He pointed out that they had a cinch. The Circle B had the Emerson-Biggar outfit dead to rights—seventy miles from nowhere. Why not clean it up proper? A sheep outfit was a blot on the earth anyway.

Wally argued for less sweeping measures. But he more or less agreed with Puzzleface.

"Or," concluded Puzzleface, "you can be chicken hearted an' turn this *hombre* loose because he's your brother. I sure wouldn't have no consideration on that account if it was me. Might be all right to let him go. Nobody's pay any attention to whatever he claimed because he's crazy as a bedbug anyway. I'm plumb sick of bein' a sheepherder by proxy. If we scatter these darned sheep the wolves'd darned soon clean 'em up. If you want to hold this here flock you better grab you a regular sheepherder to

take my place, or else run the whole works over the nearest cliff. That's what I'd do."

With which, having staged their play, they turned into their blankets and lay gazing at the stars that twinkled cheerfully down upon sleeping men over ten thousand miles of range.

GRAZING beasts rise with the dawn. The gleam of a fire while it was still dark wakened Wally Biggar. Puzzleface bent over the glow, intent upon bacon sizzling in the pan. The coffee pot steamed. Wally rose, bathed his face and hands in the cold trickle from the spring, combed his tangled brown hair. Puzzleface unshackled J. B. The three sat down to breakfast, two of them affecting a silent scowl, the third bearing a decidedly worried look. And as they ate dawn came linking up out of the east. The sun cocked his eye over the rim of the world, his golden spears tilting with the shadows. The sheep began to move out on grass, speaking with their ten thousand voices the incomprehensible, blithering language of sheep in one vast *conversazione*.

Puzzleface spat into the fire. He looked at J. B.

"Damn sheep," said he. "An' sheepmen, too!"

He walked away and saddled his horse. Wally threw scraps to the bright eyed collie dogs.

"Hike out there," he growled at J. B. "Them sheep's scatterin'."

"Wally—" J. B's voice, attitude and words were for the first time wholly placating—"let's call it off. There's no use keepin' me tied up here like this, dealin' me misery."

"J. B," Wally said curtly. "When we was small you used to run over me, but when it came to a showdown you could never lick me. Even though you was bigger'n me. But you used to try frequent. And you still tried when we grew up. You've locked horns with me for the last time. I'm goin' to fix you so you'll never trouble me again."

"I won't," J. B. said humbly. "I've had enough. I ain't altogether a damn' fool. Give me a chance to move these sheep outa this part of the country. I'll guarantee not to put no more sheep anywhere near your range."

"You couldn't if you wanted to," Wally said frankly. "Not after I finish what I'm doin'. I'm reachin' out for legal control of every water right and meadow within twenty miles of the Circle B, to protect myself against people like you. What I'd ought to do is to take you down to the Missouri and throw you in with a stone around your neck."

"You ain't that kind," J. B. muttered.

"No? Maybe not. But you never can tell what I might do if I was crowded," Wally said. "I could with a good heart kick you in the seat of the pants clear back to the Judith Basin."

"I'll quit," J. B. mumbled. "Im willin' to admit I bit off more'n I could chew."

"You sure did," Wally said. "All right, J. B. I'll give you one slim chance. You give me an agreement in writin' to buy out my interest in these sheep for what I paid for it, and get to hell out of Vale County. I'll take a chance on your ever comin' back. It'll cost you fifteen thousand dollars, and you take your loss. Agreeable?"

J. B. nodded. Wally dug a pen, ink and paper out of his saddle pockets. Colonel J. B. scratched away industriously in the sunrise. He was a business man and he drew up a businesslike document. Wally read it and nodded.

"You got three collies, the only critters in the sheep business that I admire," Wally said. "You got two good legs and ten thousand sheep. Start 'em west and keep goin'."

"But, good Lord, Wally!" J. B. sounded the complaining note once more. "I can't move them sheep single handed and carry blankets and grub to last me. It's seventy miles to the nearest settlement on the west."

"You should 'a' thought of that before you sashayed into this man's

country," Wally said—and went away to get his horse and join Puzzleface.

The pair came riding back to the cabin as J. B. walked after his sheep with a doubtful look on his face. When they rode out and overtook him again, Wally handed him a loaf of sourdough bread, a small strip of bacon, a coffee pot with a little coffee in it, and a single blanket.

"Keep movin' west," Wally admonished grimly.

They loped away. Out of sight they grinned cheerfully at each other. The situation had its humorous aspects.

"Do him good to sweat awhile," Wally said to Puzzleface.

A FEW MILES north they dropped into the bed of Painted Bank. The Circle B riders loafed about the chuck wagon. Wally issued orders. In half an hour the outfit was rolling, wagons clattering, bells on the remuda leaders tinkling, riders flapping elbows and whistling as they rode. The cavalcade moved westward until over the broken contours of the Bad Lands they could see afar the gray moving mass of Emerson-Biggar sheep. They made camp on a creek that the bleating wave of beasts would probably reach by evening.

"Don't make life too hard for him," Wally told his men. "Gather up them wagons an' horses of his and take 'em along to the Judith where he can pick 'em up. Feed him and give him a horse to ride after them sheep. I reckon his legs will play out on him long before he gets to Judith Crossin'. And don't rub it in. He's licked to a frazzle."

Then he swung away south for a last word with J. B.

"The boys will hang on your flank till you get to the Crosssin'," said he. "There you can get herders and organize yourself. And don't be a damn' fool any more, J. B. You're a big man, but you ain't bigger'n Biggar—as Laramie Jack said to me when I told him he couldn't run sheep on the Beauchamp. Is there any message you want me to give to Mary Emerson when I get back to the Circle B?"

"I'll deliver my own messages, if any, to Mary Emerson in person," J. B. responded stiffly.

"Oh, all right," Wally grinned. "I'll tell her you was too close occupied with the sheep business to call around and see her."

Wherewith he rode away, Colonel J. B. Biggar losing his temper altogether at this last shaft, and shouting almost hysterical curses after him. To which Wally, having gained a substantial and bloodless victory, paid no attention whatever.

IT HAS always puzzled Mrs. Wally Biggar how her husband contrived to persuade so forceful a character as Colonel J. B. to fold his tents and quietly steal away from good grass and water.

She regards her husband as the acme of kindness and consideration to both man and beast. She still believes sheepmen are dominated and downtrodden by cowmen—but she can in a measure see that it is done in self-preservation. She furthermore believes that if all cattlemen were like Wally Biggar, that cowmen and sheepmen would lie down together like the proverbial lion and lamb.

But the strategy Wally used to make Colonel J. B. withdraw will always remain a mystery to her. Wally never revealed to her the *modus operandi*. He chuckles about it to himself sometimes when they meet J. B. in the State capitol during the winter. But he never would tell her the brutal details. He just does not talk about that.

And neither does Colonel J. B.

SCAR

by F. R. BUCKLEY

THE CLOCK on the shabby white bulkhead of the captain's cabin struck one bell; and, with a suddenness suggestive of emotion hitherto firmly repressed, the young lady in the blue frock rose to go.

She happened (in addition to being an excessively attractive young lady in her own right) to be the daughter of the owner of this particular four thousand ton tramp steamer—the *Althea*, of Liverpool; and she had been aboard since three o'clock, which is as good a tea time as any, when the ship is to sail at midnight. From that hour until three-thirty, she had moved impeccably about the cluttered decks, pretending to be interested in the operations of a traveling crane that was starting bales of cotton goods on their way to Messrs Ginsburg and Lawrence, of New York; and pretending not to be interested in the mutual recriminations of stevedores and longshoremen. From three-thirty until a quarter past four she had partaken—at the doleful insistence

of the captain's steward, who now stood opposite to her, wringing his large red knuckled hands—of tea, bread and butter, grape jam, marmalade, cigarets, and biscuits from the big tin box with the picture of Napoleon on its lid.

It was now four-thirty, and still Captain John Wryfoot had not appeared to discharge his function in the capacity of host.

"I'm going," said Miss Watson, and picked up a pair of gloves whose counterparts, coyly exposed in a window uncommercialized by price tags, had watched the flow of traffic on the Avenue de l'Opéra.

There was, of course, more to it than precisely that. She had in mind a little speech which, conveyed to this extraordinarily callow looking steward, and by him relayed to the captain, would impress upon Mr. Wryfoot's mind the idea that his owner's daughter wished him well on this first voyage of this his first command; that she quite understood how shore business might detain a man on sailing day; and that the captain need not bother to return the handkerchief Miss Watson had dropped at the annual garden party of the Watson Line employees. A rather complicated speech, considering that it was all to be spoken casually. And its sequences were suddenly confused in Miss Watson's mind, by the actions of the steward. He seemed to be laboring under some powerful emotion, and the scar on his forehead seemed suddenly to have changed its color from purple to an angry red.

"Won't you stay just another half hour, miss?" asked Willie Bywaters. "Just until two bells?"

Miss Watson surveyed him.

"Or until a quarter to five?" pursued the steward. "Oh, miss, I don't know what's happened, but something has, or the captain'd have been here hours ago. I was right here when he was having his lunch, and the man from the office turned up and said there was urgent business up on Lord Street. And even then, miss, the captain told me to have all his shaving gear and his best suit laid out by two-thirty, miss. He might have been run over by a truck or something—you know the speed they make around these corners nowadays. But I got a feeling in my bones he hasn't been. He'll be here by five o'clock—if you'd only wait, miss. I got another kettle of water on the boil."

The owner's daughter sat down.

"You," she remarked, "have been behaving in a very unusual manner, my man. You're not an Englishman, are you?"

"No, miss. American. From San Francisco."

"Yes. And why are you so keen that I should wait for Captain Wryfoot?"

"Because—"

THE PALLID figure in the grease stained, semi-nautical attire, came to an abrupt stop. The wringing of the hands, that rubbing together of the veterans of a thousand dishwaters, had ceased. Willie Bywaters stood almost upright, and there was that in his eyes which reminded one of a man.

"You have been with him a long time?"

"Since he was second mate. In sail, miss. The old *Whitlieburn*."

"I didn't know second mates had servants."

Willie Bywaters drew a breath.

"They haven't, miss. It was just that I met the captain then. He threw this belaying pin at me."

There was a slight motion of the hand toward that purple red scar on the forehead.

"What?" gasped Miss Watson.

"Oh yes, miss. He came aboard late one night in Frisco, and I was down aft seein' whether there might be anything to steal. I'd run all out of cocaine, see, and I was pretty nigh crazy. I'd got a gun, too; but he didn't give me any chance to use it. He snatched a pin from the rail and laid me kicking from ten feet away."

"You mean—cocaine?"

"Yes, miss. I was what they call a dock rat; mother gone to heaven and father gone to —to — Excuse me, miss. There was a lot of us in Frisco after the fire. We all took coke when we could get it. Used to seem's though you got more for your money than buyin' food."

Miss Watson drew a long breath. Overhead somebody with more enthusiasm than knowledge of rigging let fall on the boat deck something whose impact jarred the cabin. The Napoleonic tin of biscuits shivered, teetered, and fell to the floor; and in a moment Willie Bywaters was on his knees picking up the scattered delicacies.

Something stirred in the heart of the owner's daughter. These were but butter snaps, eleven pence the pound; but on the other hand, captains got only thirty quid a month.

"Leave those things alone," she said irritably. "Well, what happened next?"

"Next?" said Willie Bywaters. "Well, I guess the captain found I wasn't much of a robber, miss—only a kid that had lost his ma and pa. The cabin boy had skipped the ship, so he fixed up my head in his cabin and got me the job. I've been at sea ever since."

"Do you take drugs now?"

"No, miss. That's why—"

"Why what?" asked the owner's daughter.

The steward's lips worked soundlessly for a moment. His mind, so hopelessly concealed behind that commonplace face, seemed to be grappling with mighty phrases; but his eyes were likewise upon that inexorable brass clock.

"Why—why I've stayed with the captain, miss."

A silence fell. The crane had stopped its puffing and clanking, and the derricks their clattering rush. Of all the sounds of the Liverpool Mersey front, there came to that cabin one only—the sad howl of a Wallasey ferry giving way to the *Caronia*, inward bound.

"I must be going," said Miss Watson. She hesitated. "Tell Captain Wryfoot—"

"Yes, miss?" asked Willie Bywaters.

"Tell him—I was here. Good day."

II

GIVEN Liverpool as the port of departure, December as the month, and ten knots as the speed of the ship, it is on the third day that a master mariner who has left his shore affairs in disorder begins to feel really depressed. He is done with home waters, the flashing light of Fastnet has been dropped astern, and before him stretches three thousand miles of gray water capable of almost anything. It is just about here, too, that the last of the following gulls may hesitate, balance on motionless pinions in the misty air, then turn about and go back to England.

So that it was no surprise to Willie Bywaters that on the third day out, Mr. First Mate Heywood should emerge from the captain's cabin in a rubicund condition of the ears, and with blood, or the desire for it, in his eye.

"What the hell," said Mr. Heywood, "is the matter with the old man?"

Willie Bywaters was standing in the doorway of the mess room, an indelibly soiled table cloth in one hand and a bouquet of knives in the other.

"I don't know, sir."

"Has he been riding you too, or is there something personal in this?"

"Nothing personal, sir. The captain—"

"Well?"

"I think something happened to upset him."

Mr. Heywood cocked his cap back on

his head, and scratched one hairy red eyebrow.

"I should say so. My God, I go in with a hurricane warning an' you'd think I was after him with a bill or something. What was it that upset him, anyhow? Do you know?"

It is not customary for first mates to seek information of captain's stewards, but Mr. Heywood had sailed before with Willie Bywaters. He knew about the cocaine and the belaying pin, and the worship to which they had led; and then again Willie had put Mr. Heywood to bed when, having eaten decayed lobster in restaurants, the mate had come aboard various ships in various ports, feeling terribly ill and singing "The Maid of Amsterdam".

"Well, it's no business of mine, sir."

"It's business of everybody's, it strikes me. He might bite."

"No, sir. I think missing that tea engagement annoyed him very much."

"You mean with Miss Watson? Well, she didn't mind. I met her as she was goin' ashore, an' she said she'd much sooner have the skipper attending to her business than—"

An expression of horror overspread Mr. Heywood's face.

"You don't think," he inquired in a whisper, "that he's—?"

It was obvious to the most amateur of telepathists that Willie Bywaters not only thought Captain Wryfoot was in love with Miss Watson, but that he was prepared to bet his immortal soul on the fact. However, he said nothing. The buzzer in the steward's pantry burst into a raucous call.

"Well," said Mr. Heywood, "if old Jabe Watson ever learns about it, I'll get my promotion the next day. You better answer that. He's in the proper frame of mind to throw hairbrushes."

"Don't mention it to the other officers," said the steward earnestly.

"Oh no. I'll just tell 'em it's his liver. The symptoms," said Mr. Heywood, "are much the same. You better jump. He'll be out after you."

SO THAT the *Althea* met her hurricane with an afterguard which, if not exactly cheerful, was at least unrent by internecine nose punchings. The second and third officers, after certain highly medical explanations by Mr. Heywood, restrained both their disappointment at the lack of those cuddy table stories for which Captain Wryfoot had been famous; and their indignation at being told they were unfit to stand dog watches on a mud scow. And indeed, upon the actual arrival of the storm, the captain cheered up quite considerably. As he borrowed a pair of mittens off Heywood before joining the second officer on the bridge, he told the story about the Ringling elephant in the cabbage patch; which, if not quite up to standard, was anyhow near enough.

"Feeling better?" asked the mate.

"I haven't been feeling ill," replied Mr. Wryfoot.

"Well, anyhow, you look a bit gayer than you have been."

"Gay?"

It appeared that the captain's jocosity had been but muscle deep. As though in answer to a challenge, he resumed his former mood.

"If you want to see me gay," he remarked morosely, "you might sink the bloody ship."

Mr. Heywood stared at him, paralyzed.

"Why, what's—what's happened to you, sir?"

"Oh, nothing," said Mr. Wryfoot. "Just called into old Watson's office like a servant, and made to stand up while he lay around in a chair, and told to keep my dirty, tarry hands off his daughter."

"Well, I guess," said the mate in a Machiavellian manner, "that you could live quite a while longer without her, couldn't you, sir?"

"Ak— You bet. I— What I mean—" said the captain, swallowing the bait whole and endeavoring agonizedly to digest it. He created a diversion by bursting into the roar of a wounded lion.

"But who the hell does that old brig think he is? What the hell does he think I am?"

"Well," said the mate, "if he's ignorant, you don't want to let it get your nanny."

"What the hell you mean?"

"Well, you don't want to go talking about the ship sinking an' all that guff. It's bad luck. You know that as well as I do. And it isn't," said Mr. Heywood, who in another incarnation may have been a banderillero in the bull ring at Madrid, "as though you were in love with the girl."

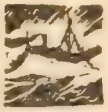
"Would you mind your own dog-rammed business?" asked Captain Wryfoot, and clumped answerless down the corridor and up to the flying bridge.

He was six feet in height, and built (to quote a boatswain who had fought him) like a brick house. According to the published statement of another authority —a lady novelist who had crossed in the *Thuringia* while Wryfoot was fourth mate—he had "eyes like sapphires, set in a filigree of wrinkles caused by sun and wind and laughter". He was, moreover, by common consent of the noble navy of tramp officers, a white man and a darn' nice fellow. Being quite unaware of all these matters, and having carefully concealed even from himself the idea that his first serious love affair had come to a bad end, he naturally thought the cause of his sudden feeling of cosmic injustice was the first gust of the coming storm, which, as he appeared on the bridge, slammed him sportively against a bulkhead and smashed his wrist watch.

"How's your lookouts?" he demanded of the second officer. "Well, double 'em. Might have a couple on the wings of the bridge, too. What's the last word of this wireless?"

" 'Probably snow'," said the mate.

"I wish he'd learn to write a decent hand," said the captain bitterly. "I thought it was oranges. Tube the engine room. They might want to do something about their donkey engines freezing. What's the temperature?"



THE TEMPERATURE was eight degrees above freezing, but in two hours it dropped to ten below. Meanwhile the wind rose—a bitter norther which seemed from time to time to blow straight down from the clouds on to the *Althea's* deck, forcing the ship down bodily into a trough of the increasing sea. For the most part, however, the gale blew against the steamer's rust streaked starboard side. Over she would go—twenty degrees, thirty. The curve of her bilge would come into sight; the wind would shriek through rigging and funnel stays in a wild attempt to improve the advantage and turn her all the way over, and then back she would swing, in time to stand upright to the smash of a racing sea.

At four bells in the second dog watch, the thermometer showed two degrees above zero, the forecastle head was sheathed in ice, and the snow was coming. During the night it came in the fullest sense of the word—wet snow, half frozen, whose flakes drummed on woodwork and slapped on flesh; stung like buckshot at long range, and stuck like glue. The glue feature prevented any use of the bridge windows and forced those on watch outside to experience the buckshot.

"We'll have to bring her up to it," said Mr. Wryfoot, in the morning. "This is no good."

The second mate was below, sitting on fingers which he heartily believed to be frostbitten, and cursing the particular sea which had smashed in his port and drenched all the clothes into which he might have changed. Mr. Heywood was on watch for the next four hours. So was the captain, but for him there was no relief.

"You don't think we'd better take it on the quarter? She'll ship the bloody ocean."

"We're light aft, and she's got a bow like a wherry."

Mr. Heywood nodded.

"All right. You don't think that

spare bower's likely to carry away, do you?"

Captain Wryfoot turned from giving his orders to the quartermaster, and said that he did not know a thing about what the spare bower was likely to do, and that he did not care.

"Call your lookouts out of the bow," he said grimly. "I'm goin' to do the proper thing under the circumstances, an' if those chains give way after I've reported 'em an' they haven't been replaced—that'll be up to Mr. Jabez Watson. I'm not going to get the ship pooped and lose my ticket."

"All right," said Mr. Heywood deprecatingly.

A sea, tearing out of the dawn graying obscurity with the speed of an express train, met the *Althea* head on and stopped her. She shuddered, lowered her bow; it wove for an instant from side to side like the head of a prize fighter who sinks toward the canvas; and another sea, leaping over the shoulders of the first, boarded the forecastle and thundered into the well deck.

Captain Wryfoot's lips tightened.

"Try the engines at slow," he ordered, and Heywood stepped to the telegraph.

IT WAS just fifty-three hours later—to be precise, at seven bells of the forenoon watch on Tuesday, December twelfth—that a sea finally gripped the spare bower anchor and tore it loose from the chains that held it prostrate on the forecastle head. Captain Wryfoot had then been continuously on the bridge for seventy-three hours; nevertheless it was he who first heard, above the howling of the storm, the comparatively confidential sound made by those four tons of iron as they carromed off a winch and, with thirty tons of water for company, fell off the break of the forecastle into the well deck. It was he, furthermore, who (after Mr. Heywood had been flung against the butt of the foremast to the extent of one broken arm) took command of all hands, in the well deck assembled, and directed the sport of lassoing the anchor with seven-eighths inch wire rope.

He lost two men almost immediately. One went over the side, his arms flung wildly up above the crest of a marauding sea; another was between the anchor and the bitts when the anchor slid suddenly to starboard. There was nothing to be done while the *Althea* was head up to the storm; she'd have to change her course, and take it on the quarter after all. Captain Wryfoot, haggard and crusted with ice, his forehead bleeding from a passing encounter with a bulwark, appeared on the bridge to change the course.

While he was gone, the anchor rolled whimsically over and started four deck plates adjoining No. 1 hatch.

God looked down upon the *Althea* from somewhere beyond the whistling pall that served for a sky in those parts, and saw what Mr. Wryfoot and his men went through during the next four hours. They got the ropes about the anchor. Once they were on the very point of securing it when one of the five men hauling to port, slipped in the man who had been caught against the bitts; and the next instant, the anchor had taken charge again. It slithered aft to boom sickeningly against the forward bulkhead of the house. The captain staggered over to the man who had slipped, cursed at him inaudibly, and then quite unjustly knocked him down. Whereupon the other four men of that hauling gang fell upon the captain, and one of them tried to find his neck with his teeth and worry him. The third officer, seeing this through the spindrift, came down from the bridge between seas, and kicked that man heavily in the face with his sea boots . . .

It was enough—quite enough.

So the *Althea* lifted her stern before a pooping sea and rolled terrifically to port; and the anchor charged across the deck to the bulwarks, smashed out ten feet of them, and went over the side.

And in another four hours, the wind began to go down.

III

"HOW'S the arm, sir?"

"It hurts like hell. I think," said Mr. Heywood, "that you put those splints on cock eyed. How's the old man?"

"He's asleep, sir."

"What?" Mr. Heywood swung his feet out of his bunk, and at a roll of the ship fell unreservedly into the arms of Willie Bywaters. "My God, I've been asleep myself. You gave me morphia, you—. Gimme my gear."

"The second and third are on the bridge, sir. The weather's a lot better."

"Gimme my gear, blast you. Don't try to put the arm in, you fool! Where is he?"

"He's on the chart house table, sir," said Willie Bywaters, starting to weep. "He came up from securing the anchor and he started talking in a silly kind of voice, and then he keeled over on the table and we haven't been able to wake him up. And I'd brought him some hot coffee, all fresh."

"Don't cry, you bloody idiot! Is he dead?"

"N-no sir. Just exhausted."

Mr. Heywood ceased his violent one armed shaking of Mr. Bywaters, and moved toward the door.

"You heat up that coffee," he said, "and bring it up to me."

"I'd thought," he added, "that you were a bit better than the run of stewards, but you're just like the blubberin' rest. Make it quick, now."

"Yes, sir," said Willie Bywaters, mopping his reddened eyes.

And so Mr. Heywood, the second mate and the third officer, whose name was Wilkins and who came of an excellent family, laid into Captain Wryfoot and tried to waken him. For this course of action they had reasons that seemed to them good and sufficient, in view of the facts that the hurricane was not yet officially over, and that there existed an organization known as the Board of Trade. This board was the authority that licensed Captain Wryfoot to command vessels of any tonnage on any ocean, and it had the privilege of investigating any accidents which might happen while he was asleep, assuming him to be guilty of negligence unless he could prove himself innocent.

So they slapped Captain Wryfoot in the face. They opened his shirt and poured ice water on his chest, and he merely rolled from one side of the chart table to the other and said that he would positively get up and find those keys just as soon as he had eaten his breakfast egg.

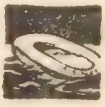
"He's mad," said the third officer, who had never been through a North Atlantic hurricane before.

"No," said Mr. Heywood, "he's just—"

"What's that?" demanded the subject of their conversation, suddenly sitting bolt upright, wide awake.

The *Althea*, running easily before the diminishing gale, had stumbled suddenly. She had not stopped dead and quivered as she had when her bow had come up to meet the sea which had torn loose her anchor. Simply, she had checked in mid-pitch, and then surged forward as though she moved under protest. And from her bottom plates, conducted upward to the chart house by the steel frames and pillars of her sides, there came, low but vibrantly, the noise of tearing.

"She's struck!" cried Captain Wryfoot in a strange, hoarse voice. Shouldering aside Willie Bywaters and his coffee, he charged forth bareheaded to the bridge.



THE *ALTHEA* had struck the wreck of the schooner *Good Hope*, lost the year before, with all hands. Axes before the calamity, or weather afterwards, had taken away the *Good Hope's* masts; the seas had robbed her of her rails and deck houses; her cargo had sunk her hull to the level of the surrounding waters, and sustained it there. She had been awash. Now, rising again behind the stern of the *Althea*, she bobbed on a wave crest, dispassionately spewing timber out of the gash in her weed green side.

The engine room tube whistled.

"The propeller's gone! There's water in the engine room!" yelled a Scot's voice in Heywood's ear. "What we—"

"Her bottom's out, sir," said Heywood to Captain Wryfoot. "Engine room wants to know what to do. Screw's carried away."

The captain leaned heavily against the chart house doorpost.

"Has the carpenter sounded the wells?" he inquired.

The *Althea* buried her nose under a sea —and did not recover. She came up, to be sure; but not all the way. Already, within a minute after the crash, she was down by the head. Babblings came from the engine room tube; then ceased. Some one had thrown down the mouthpiece and taken to the ladders.

"What's the use of that?" shouted the third mate. "She's sinking! Can't you see that?"

Captain Wryfoot cast a glance over his shoulder.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I suppose she is. On the other hand—"

Heywood came forward.

"Listen, John," he said. "You were asleep. You didn't hear it until it was all over. She's torn wide open."

"All right," said Captain Wryfoot. He appeared to think a while. "Then—Give the order. All hands abandon ship. Send out an SOS. You look after it, Heywood. I'm tired. Steward."

"Yes, sir?"

"Coffee. Where are the second and third going, Heywood?"

"Focsle and wireless house, sir. SOS and abandon ship. Which boat will you take?"

"Who, me?" asked Captain Wryfoot. "I shan't take any."

He looked up at Mr. Heywood with a drowsy smile.

"Oh, no, dear heart," he continued. "No boats for yours very truly. This is the captain's first command and he has lost it; and the Board of Trade will hold an inquiry and say that he was wrong to shift his bow lookouts, even when she was shipping it green. And they will cancel his ticket. Or endorse it."

"There's all of us to swear it was an act of God."

"Yes. Well, anyhow I'm tired. And what the hell've I got to live for, anyhow? You mind your business, Heywood, and I'll mind mine."

A tray clanked on the chart house table, and a commonplace face topped with wishy-washy red hair and a scar appeared before Captain Wryfoot.

"You don't understand," wailed Willie Bywaters. "Listen, boss. I seen the lady when she was down here. She waited for you an hour and fifty minutes. She loves you as much as you love her, I tell you. She does, I tell you! Think I don't know? Listen, boss . . . "

Much after the fashion of a herculean sleep walker, the captain laid his hand across the mouth of Willie Bywaters, and pushed him spinning across the chart house. Willie collapsed in a corner, and the captain took up the coffee pot in a steady hand. Fatigue poisons had produced on him the effects of other poisons more widely known. He gave the impression of being icy drunk.

"On your way, Heywood," he said.

"Not without you."

The captain put down the pot and the coffee he had begun to pour. He reached rapidly into his pocket and produced a revolver.

"You'll go, by God, if I tell you to," he said slowly. "I'll march you to the boat by your broken arm if you say any more. Get on at it!"

THE *ALTHEA* gave a sickening lurch. She was debating, after the manner of mortally wounded ships, whether to go down stern or bow first, and the bows seemed to have it. A wireless operator burst in with the news that a Cunarder had received their signal, and would be with them in two hours. Wryfoot used the revolver to motion him toward salvation.

"This ship won't last ten minutes," he said. "You've got a wife and kids, Heywood. I'm going down with the ship."

"Why should you?"

"Why the hell shouldn't I? Give old Watson my love. Tell him about the anchor. I'll count ten, but then as sure as God's above, I'll frog's march you by that broken arm."

So Heywood went, and endeavored to cause the crew of No. 4 boat to join him in going back and overpowering the captain—and saving him by main force. But the crew of No. 4 boat was made up of stokers, and admired its own corporate hide more than that of any deck officer. Mr. Heywood was yanked into the boat, and forbidden to move out of it unless he wanted to stay out. And so he sat amidships, where he should not have been, swaying to and fro under the davits, and trying to tell hopeless amateurs how to let go the falls.

Meanwhile Willie Bywaters had picked himself up from the corner into which he had been flung, and had approached his master—the man who had cut his forehead with that deep red purple scar with the belaying pin, his savior, his idol. Captain Wryfoot had turned his back on the chart house and was looking forward over the forecastle head, watching the seas welcoming the *Althea* in to their depths.

"She *was* in love with you, sir," snivelled Willie Bywaters.

"What the hell do you know about it?" said Mr. Wryfoot, swinging about on the sharply inclined deck.

"Nobody's ever been in love with me, sir. That's how I know."

"Get into your boat," said the captain, turning his back.

Willie Bywaters thrust out his hand and groped for something on the wall.

"She wasn't the kind to let her father boss her, sir," he said, his eyes fixed on the back of Captain Wryfoot's neck.

"Who told you anything about it?"

"Mr. Heywood, while I was setting his arm, sir. For God's sake, don't be angry with me. I— This was an act of God, sir. Nobody could blame you for it."

The captain turned his back again. The *Althea*, filling some new compartment, seemed to stand on her head in the sea. From ten yards aft, where Mr. Heywood's boat was dangling, there came roars of alarm.

"Plenty of time yet!" bellowed Heywood. "Let me out, you sons of unmarried mothers, till I show you how it's done. Slack away, you with the bottle nose."

"You wouldn't lose your ticket, sir," said Willie Bywaters. "She loves you, sir. For God's sake, come and get into a boat."

"Go yourself. Shut your whining head."

Mr. Bywaters' hand had found that for which it had been groping. This chanced to be a fire ax, suspended in clips from the chart house bulkhead. He detached this weapon and stood weighing it in his hands, blunt end to.

"You won't come, sir? For God's sake!"

"No," said Captain Wryfoot, beginning to turn in his wrath.

As the fire ax took him in the center of the forehead, he seemed to hear a faint but heartfelt "Excuse me!"

Willie Bywaters gathered him up in his arms.

IV

AND SO they were married, Miss Dorothy Watson and Captain John Wryfoot, R.N.R. Now he is vice-president of the Watson Lines, and in much demand as a speaker at banquets of the shipping and allied interests.

He has a manservant named Willie Bywaters, one of whose jobs, before each of the banquets aforesaid, is to take a stick of grease paint and obliterate a deep scar on the forehead of his master.

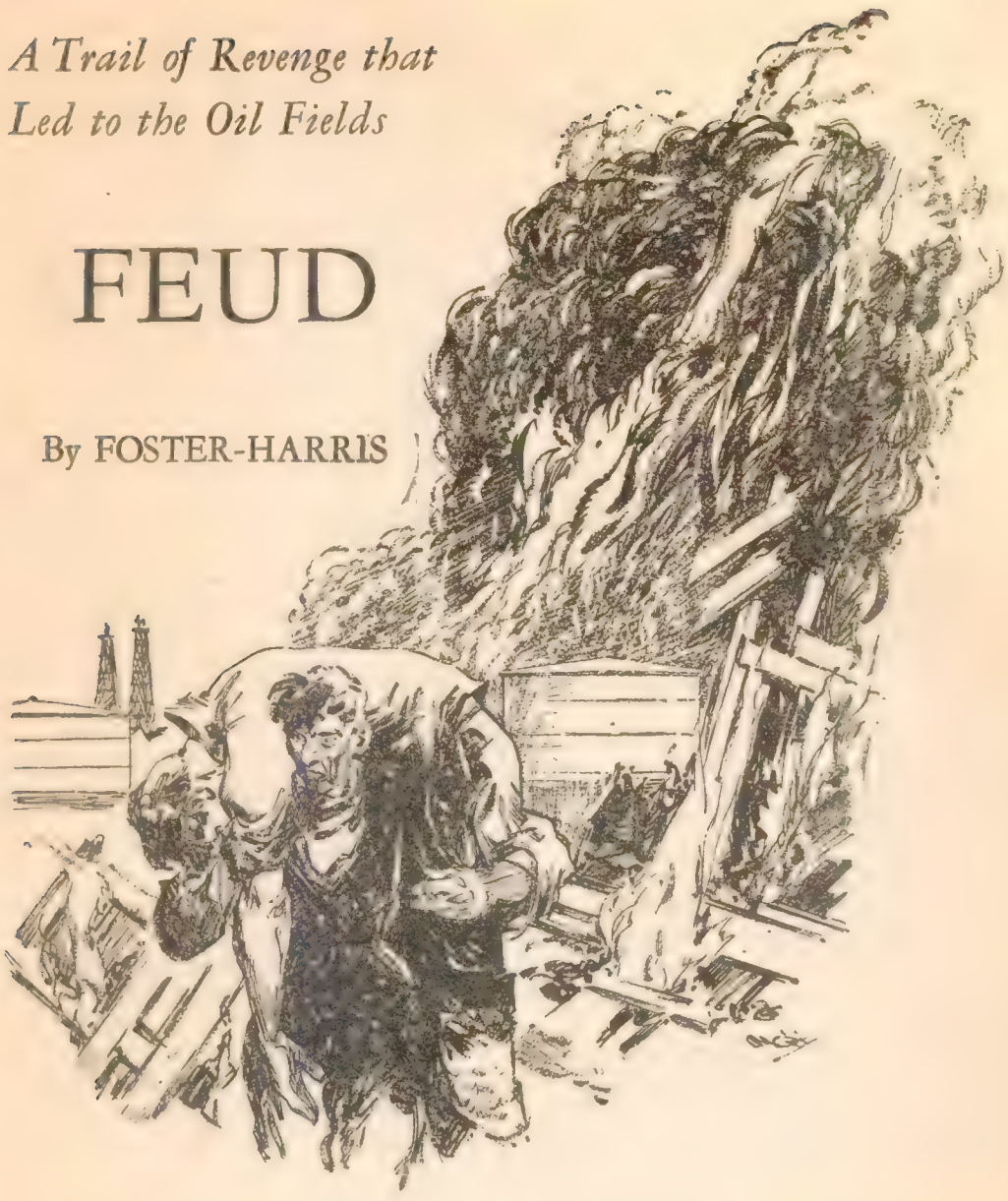
Mrs. Wryfoot has noticed a similar scar on the forehead of Willie Bywaters, and does not care for the likeness.

Can you imagine that?

A Trail of Revenge that Led to the Oil Fields

FEUD

By FOSTER-HARRIS



THE WILD, jungle music had stopped with a panic stricken crash. The tawdry crowd had fled madly, screaming and shouting as the thundering roar of rapidly fired revolvers rocked the hall.

Lance Denton and Carl Thorpe had met again. Young Lance was dying on the floor and Thorpe had vanished.

Morbidly, insatiably curious, the dancers swept back in packed, whispering ranks around the dying man. A dance hall girl, her mascaraed eyes strangely wet, painted lips trembling, dropped into a little heap beside the roughneck, holding his head in her lap, gently wiping away the bloody froth that oozed from lips already turning a ghastly blue.

With the charge of a maddened bull, Buck Denton came crashing through the

crowd. He stopped with a strangled cry and dropped upon his knees beside his brother.

"Lance, boy, wait! Wait, Lance!" The plea tore out of anguished lips. "This is Buck, Lance! Old Buck! Wait, Lance!"

Infinitely slow, the dying man opened his eyes. A faint smile flickered vaguely over his gray face. The lips trembled.

"Buck—" just a sigh—"I—I—shore—played—hell."

"Who was it, Lance?"

"Carl—Thorpe. Too—fast—for—me."

"I'll get him, boy," the big driller choked. "Gawd, Lance, don't die!"

The boy's eyes closed and a fit of coughing shook his body. With a hoarse sob his brother gathered him into his arms, holding him against his breast like a child, his great body rocking in terrible grief.

"Buck. Oh, Buck—" the faintest of whispers. The big driller bent his face close to the blue lips.

"My — boots — Buck. Promised — maw—" The gray eyes begged eloquently.

"His boots," the driller directed the dance hall girl in a low tone. "Get 'em off, quick."

Awkward in her haste, the girl obeyed, unlacing the heavy oilfield boots with clumsy fingers, drawing them off the limp feet. The eyes of the dying man thanked her then turned again to the face of the older brother.

"Lance, baby, wait," sobbed the big driller. "You can't die, hear me? You mustn't! A doc is comin' quick, boy. Jus' a minute now."

The eyes smiled faintly. For an instant it seemed that they tried valiantly to speak. Then they closed, the black head slid gently down against the big driller's breast and the heavy breathing of the crowd was suddenly the only sound.

The dance hall girl was sobbing. Gently the big driller placed an ear against his brother's breast, listened vainly a minute, then straightened, his face frozen into gray, hard lines, his eyes black with grief.

"Thank you, sister," he said quietly to the girl.

"He—he was nice to me." The girl's voice was somehow defiant through her tears. "He was awful—nice."

The big driller rose, the body of his brother limp in his arms.

"Listen, you all," his voice rang. "For this I'm gonna kill Carl Thorpe. One year or a hundred, I'll find him!"

Awed, the crowd fell back and he went slowly out into the clamorous night of the booming field, his brother's body in his arms.

A short, hatchet faced man, the nasal sharpness of the Yankee in his voice, leaped to the orchestra platform and waved his arms.

"All right, that's over!" he cried. "What d'ye say naow, boys and girls, a real Smackover dance. Lots of snap. Let's hev it. Whee! Here we go!"

The music began anew. The dancers eddied for a moment around the spot where Lance Denton had died, then swept over it like waves over an islet. The dance had resumed. Outside, the great, straining teams toiled endlessly by in the night, hauling boilers, casing, tools, what-not through the bottomless Smackover mud to the roaring field.

THEY buried Lance Denton in a rapidly growing cemetery which an irreverent wag had dubbed "Last Hole Lease". And standing by the raw, new mound, Buck Denton, last of the fighting Dentons, stared grimly out over the forest of derricks towering through the trees, his eyes the dead gray of the ocean before a storm.

It had been a long trail and a bloody one. No one knew now just how the feud had started back in the Kentucky hills. Thorpes had killed Dentons and Dentons had killed Thorpes. The feud had been carried on into Arkansas, into Texas when sons of both families had heard the glamorous call of gold in the oil fields. Naturally the warfare had languished as the last combatants drifted apart. The passing of Lance Denton had been the first killing in four years. The passing of

Carl Thorpe would end the long struggle.

The big driller stared grimly out over the ugly burial plot and closed his great hands.

"Some day, Lance, baby," he promised. "Somewhere I'll get him."

From that day Buck Denton lived for a single puspose. Following his trade he followed the boom fields, eternally searching.

Plenty of traces he found but not once did he actually catch sight of his elusive quarry. Into the Osage, to Whiz Bang, Cooper, Three Sands, Tonkawa—wild boom towns of the Oklahoma oil fields—he patiently tracked his man.

Back to Smackover when it boomed for the second time he trailed Carl Thorpe, then into Oklahoma again; into the Cromwell flush field and from there into the great Texas Panhandle boom. Into Greater Seminole, the greatest flush field the world has yet seen he followed him. And finally the long trail led into the newest black Golconda of them all, the Winkler field of far, West Texas, over the Pecos in the sand country.

There was about this tremendous field the most savage desolation Buck Denton had ever known. A wild, barren, until the discovery of oil, all but unpopulated country, the Winkler field lay sprawling in tumultuous action over miles of desert.

The distances recalled anew the infinite spaces of the old West. Sandy trails, rutted by hundreds of trucks, lay in a maze across the leagues of land. Hundreds of wells were drilling or producing, stretching for miles. Great tank farms, orderly camps of the big companies in the field, pipelines, material yards, supply depots, innumerable bivouacs of the followers of oil flung over the great stage a vigorous, strange life that was, in its way, one of the great epics of the modern West.

Into this tremendous battleground of industry came Buck Denton, man hunter, following a cold trail. With the canny foresight of the old driller, he came with full knowledge of just where he was going, and what he was going to do.

At the field headquarters of the Plains Petroleum Corporation he found, as he had expected, Ancel Walters, their superintendent whom he had known in Smackover. Twenty minutes later he was riding out to the Plains C lease with a cub geologist in a rattling car, to take over a job as tool pusher.

REMOTE from the original discovery area of the field, the C lease was in the northern extension of the field that pushed up toward the Texas-New Mexico line on the north, the line toward which production was trending. On the lease, a great sprawling slice of desolation, the Plains company had five wells drilling, or preparing to start, none of them as yet in the pay sands. As tool pusher it would be Denton's job to see that those wells lacked nothing to keep going, that they did keep going until they proved dry or productive.

The car toiled painfully through the sand into a shabby collection of shacks, tents and frame buildings. The road was lined with the neat gray and white rows of buildings of a great oil company camp on the one side, the huge, cylindrical black bulks of a score or more of gigantic oil storage tanks in a tank farm on the other.

"This is Crude," explained the geologist carelessly. "They named it for crude oil but you can take it anyway you please. That's our camp over there and this is our tank farm too."

"You sure got some town," commented Denton sardonically, eyeing the double row of shacks and huts that flanked the trail.

"Oh, it isn't our town," disclaimed the geologist hastily. "We don't own this land here. When we put our camp and tank farm out here some wild eyed promoters grabbed off an acre or two and started selling lots before we knew anything about it. We aren't proud of it."

The tool pusher grinned.

"Crude, eh?" he grunted. "It damn' sure is."

"And how," agreed the geologist lazily.

"Some of these days one of those fifty-fives over there is gonna catch fire and just simply cremate this burg. You watch."

Denton glanced idly at the tank farm. Great fifty-five thousand barrel tanks stood in rows, each tank separated from its fellow by an encircling earthen dike, with four tremendous, eighty thousand barrel monsters set in the center of the herd of fifty-fives.

"Nice layout," he commented. "They full?"

"About half of them are," responded the geologist. "We've got a pipeline outlet now, and this proration order is holding down our production some, but we'll sure use those tanks before fall."

Denton was silent. They jolted through the raw town, turned into the gate of the big Plains camp.

"You'll stay here," explained the geologist pleasantly. "Some of the stuff you'll need will come out of the yard here. Rest of it will come from headquarters."

The tool pusher nodded, staring at a group of roustabouts going by.

"Say," he said quietly. "You don't happen to know a man name Thorpe down here, do you?"

"Thorpe?" pondered the young geologist. "N-no, I don't think I do. Friend of yours?"

"I'd admire to see him again," said Denton quietly—too quietly.

The geologist turned his face toward the big man, a question in his eyes. He opened his mouth, then closed it without a sound. Customs of the old West, some of them, still lingered about oil fields. You did not ask a man many questions.

"Here's where your office will be," the geologist said abruptly, bringing the car to a halt in front of a long, squat building.

"C'mon in and get acquainted with the boys."

With the morning Buck Denton took up his new duties, exacting, responsible, but not necessarily arduous—at least not usually so. Long experience made it easy for him to drop solidly into the job and keep his five tests going. Within a week he had the last of the five spudded, while the first to start had topped the big lime and was nearing the expected gusher pay.

As tool pusher it was a roving job, always on the move from well to well, back to offices and supply yards, driving everywhere about the field. On duty and off, Denton looked for Carl Thorpe. He did not find him.

THREE weeks passed. The Plains No. 1 well on the C lease went into the gas, set casing, shut the gas off, drove into the big pay. Under the watchful eye of Buck Denton the crew completed the well, and a new five thousand barrel gusher was chalked up in the scout reports of the field.

"Next one will be bigger," grunted Buck to the Plains superintendent, standing by as they gauged the well before pinching it in.

The No. 2-C was larger—an eight thousand barrel producer, completed ten days later. Denton still had found no traces of the man he sought.

A hard, almost impossible task it was, to trace an obscure man in a great boom field. Hundreds of workers were scattered over miles of territory, separated by all but impassable sandy trails. Pouring into the field from all over the Mid-Continent, no one, it seemed, knew any one else or cared. Each man looked out for himself. The devil could take the rest.

When the No. 3-C was completed and turned into the lines, it appeared to Denton that he had again drawn blank in his search for the last of the Thorpes. Great muscled, silent, graying slightly now at the temples, he drove relentlessly on, doing his work; doing it well—and watching.

One evening he drove into the Plains tank farm enclosure on the other side of Crude from the camp, to see about a gauger, and as had become his habit, stopped to talk with old John Williams, the farm boss.

Grown gray in the game, Williams had acquired the calm, fatalistic philosophy

of the old soldier, the grizzled frontiersman, the veteran of innumerable flush fields. They sat on a pile of rig timbers—old Williams the farm boss, and Denton the tool pusher, placidly chewing strong scrap tobacco from the same sack.

"Gonna storm tonight," observed Williams, weatherwise from years in the West, casting a reflective glance toward the sullen sky.

"Looks like it," agreed Denton.

They sat silently. In the south the play of lightning behind the banking clouds grew stronger.

"Sheet lightnin'," said Denton, pointing.

"Yeah," agreed Williams, "Lightnin' tonight."

More silence.

"Ten tanks plumb full," observed the farm boss suddenly. "One or two of 'em catch and they're liable to burn hell outa them shacks there."

He jerked a thumb toward the shacks and tents of Crude, the boom town, now spilling against the very fence of the great tank farm.

"Too damn' close," agreed Denton. "Oughta be moved."

"Lightnin' hit one of these tanks, they'll be moved," commented the farm boss. "Lotta wimmin and kids in there."

They grew silent. Overhead the clouds began to twist and roll in ugly, rolled masses. The wind died and it was queerly still; so still that the noises of the town, the throbbing and clank of great trucks on the road, even the panting of a steam driller far down the highway came clearly to their ears. An angry yellow light, like a strange blight, was falling from the sky.

"Gonna rain plenty," declared Denton.

"If it would just rain down here often enough," mused Williams, "this here would be a reg'lar paradise for farmers."

"That's all hell needs, too," observed Denton dryly. "Just water."

More silence. A few spattering drops fell hissing into the dust.

"Reckon I better be going before the rain," decided the tool pusher, rising. "See you tomorrow, maybe."

The farm boss waved goodby and remained seated on the timbers, a graven figure enigmatically staring at the sky, his jaws working rhythmically.

The gate keeper threw open the gates of the ten foot cyclone wire fence that enclosed the farm, and Denton drove out, turning up the road into Crude to go to his quarters in the big camp on the other side of town.

As he jolted past the melange of mushroom buildings that formed the squalid outskirts, now beginning to crowd the tank farm fence, he stared curiously.

Women and children were there, frowsy slatterns, unwashed infants, dogs, surly, unkempt men. Passing and repassing through it daily, he had paid little attention to Crude. He drove soberly on, thinking, and ran his car hastily under the big truck shed in the camp just as the first splattering barrage of raindrops began.

THE RAIN hammered the field in staccato, hissing bursts. Darkness came blanketing down. The lights on the drilling rigs, the yards, the trucks, offices, buildings winked like a carnival in the night. The rain ceased abruptly. Tremendous bursts of sheet lightning intermittently lit the whole sky. The darkness between the flashes clung with sullen, ominous persistence, closing down ceaselessly over the feeble, distant lights.

There was the thick, disturbing smell of a coming storm. The lightning began to play in constant, ghastly flashes across the heavens. With a howling roar the wind arrived, returning the rain in cataracting, solid sheets. A roaring bolt stabbed down from the boiling sky to shake the earth. The storm was on.

From the door of the office Denton quietly stood watching the storm, smoking an old pipe. Tip Snyder, one of the production men came up behind him, laying a hand on his shoulder.

"Some little blow," said Snyder, shouting to make himself heard above the wind.

Denton nodded. Suddenly there came

a blinding flash, a screaming of maddened wind and the production man's fingers dug sharply into his shoulder as, wildly excited, he pointed.

"Look!" he screamed. "My God, look! There goes the hotel!"

In the crackling flash they had seen the flimsy, two story Oil Men's Hotel smashing in the wind, going down with a liquid, glistening flow like a house of cards.

"Cyclone!" cried Snyder hysterically.

They waited for the next flash and as it came they could see tiny black figures that were men, running toward the stricken building.

"Going?" screamed Snyder. "C'mon, let's go!"

"Wait!" shouted Denton through teeth clamped tight upon his pipe. "Look out. Ahhh!"

A gigantic sword of flame smote down with a thundering roar from the very apex of the sky, and instantly there leaped to meet it a tremendous, blinding flash, the crashing chaos of an earth gone mad.

"My God!" screamed Snyder. "It's a tank!"

Kaleidoscopic flashes of thundering light, like a bursting barrage, shot above the tank farm beyond the town. Suddenly, with a dry, sobbing roar, a volcanic pillar of molten flame sprang charging into the reeling sky.

Thick, pungent smoke came hurtling around them, torn to fragments by the screaming wind and an ocean of angry, bloody light poured out to make inferno of the night.

"It's a fifty-fiver," shouted Denton, his pipe stem bitten off clean between his teeth. "A fifty-five—in this storm! Let's go!"

Out of the building they burst, drenched to the skin before they had gone five steps, reeling, staggering, fighting against the enormous wind that tore at them with a million insane hands.

Clouds of stifling smoke flung by them overhead, slashing the unearthly floods of flame light into gouts like clotted blood. Through the gate of the great camp the workers were pouring in a river of running figures, bent double against the wind, the flashes of smoke shrouded light beating upon them.

Through the streaming street of the battered town they went, up to the gates of the great tank farm where a line of men, gigantic in the wild light, barred their pathway.

Old Williams, the farm boss, was standing bareheaded in the pouring rain, the water streaming down his face, the wind tearing at his drenched white hair. He gestured calmly to Denton as the big tool pusher came up. He flung an arm about his shoulders, cupping his hands and shouting full lunged into Denton's ear.

"Nothin' we can do. This storm—" Denton hardly caught the words. "Lost two men already. 'Fraid—get the town. Better see—everybody out—buildings."

Denton nodded vigorously.

"We'll do it," he roared in reply. "C'mon boys. Get 'em outa these shacks."

With a gang of workers at his heels he wheeled, flung an arm up over his face and drove along the fence straight into the rolling smoke.

IT WAS the second tank in the row nearest the fence that was burning, a fifty-five thousand barrel monster, nearly full. The raging wind was slicing whole islets of flaming oil from the top, dropping them in a cataract of fire over the side into the great encircling fire guard depression. The smoke and heat was being borne straight along the ground in a seething wall, through the fence into the town.

The wind flung smoke shot by in solid, strangling clouds, hurling itself into their faces with a smothering heat that sent the brain reeling.

They searched the first few tents and shacks, finding them empty. The rain, falling through the tremendous masses of smoke, was hot. The roaring flames made the night a hideous, bloody brown.

More huts proved empty. All of the

inhabitants living near the blazing tank seemed to have fled at the first blast.

Suddenly there came a terrific explosion, a dull, jarring roar that smote at them like a mighty blow. The red light flared up in mad crescendo so that it seemed the whirling, blinding smoke had burst into flame. A second tank had caught.

Abruptly the screaming wind dropped, the vast clouds of smoke lifted an instant and through stinging, tear blinded eyes they could see dimly across the tank farm fence the second tank, eating away the fragments of its roof in a volcano of molten flame.

Back came the wind, shifting in a crashing roar that set them hugging the ground in stark panic. The whole earth seemed to throb, the thundering roar of nature gone mad. The flame above the second tank appeared to flicker abruptly, drop back into the tank, then up it came again in a vast, booming holocaust that struck far up into the raging heavens. The tank had exploded.

With a wild scream one of the men lying against a bank farther down the street leaped to his feet and fled into the smoke and darkness. Liquid fire began to rain down upon the space between the fence and the tank.

"It's comin' over," roared Buck, the wind tearing his voice to fragments. "Run! Run like hell!"

Like frightened rabbits they fled from the burning rain. Instinctively they huddled together as they ran, forming a compact little group at Denton's back. Abruptly they were out of the thickest smoke, into a maelstrom of crazed townspeople running here and there in the street. Denton halted his men.

They turned, bending to peer through the smoke. One or two of them dropped to their knees.

"It came over," said a hoarse voice at Denton's elbow. "The town's burning."

With difficulty the tool pusher recognized the blackened, drenched speaker as Tip Snyder, the production man. He stooped low, staring with smoke stung eyes in the direction the man was pointing. Under the rolling smoke he could see buildings at the end of the row blazing furiously.

"Goodby, town," he said with a shrug of streaming shoulders. "She's gone now."

Flung forward by the screaming wind the flames charged along the row at racing speed. It seemed no more than a few seconds before the whole was ablaze; before the fire had leaped the street, eaten its way out of the direct, smoke covered area to due leeward of the tanks, and was menacing the main part of town.

Revitalized by the new emergency, the big tool pusher set his men to work with the thronging townspeople in a frenzied effort to save their goods from the threatened buildings.

Wild confusion ruled the long street; autos, men, trucks, storekeepers carrying valuables to points of safety, painted women with clothes piled high in their arms, maddened oil workers reeling in a screaming, shouting bedlam.

Two giant trucks followed by a great cordon of men came fighting their way down the street to where Denton and his men were working, lost in the mêlée of crazed townspeople.

With a glad cry the tool pusher recognized the slickered figure perched high on the leading truck. It was Ancel Walters, the big boss of the Plains company, at the head of a great crew of his men.

"Get 'em all out," the big boss screamed. "Move 'em. We're going to dynamite a clear space and stop the fire."

IN A SOLID wave the oil workers flung themselves into the doomed buildings, forcing the crowds back, stripping the structures of furnishings like a stream of gigantic ants. Flood lights on the leading truck came into action, hurling their glare into the red darkness. From his lofty stand, holding to the truck cab, the big boss looking down recognized Denton and waved to him encouragingly.

"Get in there and help," he roared. "Thataboy, Buck!"

Obediently Denton and his followers joined the swarming crew. A cable was run across the street marking the deadline. Behind this, they began to force the crowd.

Down the street the workers cleared away abruptly; two men came racing in their wake and the first of the doomed buildings crashed down under a heavy charge of dynamite.

A second building burst apart, then in rapid succession a third. There came a pause while the crews cleared the remaining buildings in the selected area.

Another building went into fragments under a terrific blast. Denton, one of the stream stripping a long, hastily built hotel, heard the crashes and then a hoarse voice bawling in the darkness of the interior in which they worked.

"Everybody out," the voice bellowed. "This dump goes next. Everybody out, quick. We're gonna dynamite!"

Denton flung himself toward a door, ran out into the volleying rain, a chair gripped in his hands.

Some one tugged frantically at his sleeve and he dropped the salvaged chair, turning to peer at whoever it was.

It was a woman, bareheaded, the rain sluicing down her wild face. Desperately she clung to the tool pusher's arm, sobbing, half shouting her message.

"He's caught!" she screamed, pointing back toward the burning buildings. "Come help him! Oh, for God's sake, quick!"

Startled, Denton turned quickly and drew her out of the shadow into the red glare of the fire.

"Who?" he shouted. "Where is he? What?"

"My husband," she choked hysterically. "Over—over there. He's caught. Oh, for God's sake, come!"

He caught what she was trying to explain.

"Lead me to him," he roared. "I'll get him out for you. Let's go!"

They plunged through the chaos of the street, skirting fallen walls, leaping timbers, running straight into the burning section. At a long two story frame rooming house, its windward side furiously aflame, its front a gaping ruin from the demolition of its neighbors, the woman stopped and pointed wildly.

"In there!" she cried. "Back in there!"

"Wait here. I'll— oh, damn," shouted Denton, grabbing futilely at the woman who had darted into the flaming house.

With a smashing oath he was after her, stumbling at her heels through the wildly wrecked, smoke filled interior, up a perilously hanging flight of stairs, down a flame lit, smoke shrouded hall, into a back room.

THE WHOLE side of this room had been torn away and the roaring flames drenched it with blood red light. Near the smashed door, half buried beneath a great pile of timbers, lay a man who squirmed helplessly.

"Here he is! Get him out. Oh, get him out!" sobbed the woman, tugging crazily at the imprisoned man's one free arm.

Denton knelt. The flames from the burning roof swept high. With a wild cry he recognized Carl Thorpe.

He began to laugh, an insane laughter, exultant, primeval, cruel beyond description.

"Carl Thorpe!" he screamed. "Damn you, Carl Thorpe! I've found you! You're gonna burn alive!"

The woman beside him whirled, incredible surprise overwhelming her, her face a crazy mask in the pouring light.

"You—you're not going to help him?" she cried. "You're not? Oh, you fiend! You fiend!"

Like a tigress she flung herself upon him and he swept her aside with one mighty heave. Still laughing horribly he bent his face low over the pinioned man, shaking him roughly.

"Thorpe! Thorpe! You know me?" he shouted. "I'm Buck Denton. You killed my brother. You're gonna burn. Hear me? Burn!"

The man on the floor threw back his

head and the furious light fell full upon his face, the lips compressed, the eyes open, unafraid.

"Yes," he said clearly. "I know you. I'd see you in hell afore I'd ask you to help me. Get outa here!"

The big tool pusher rocked back on his heels, glaring at his enemy.

"It was a fair fight," said Thorpe defiantly. "You all killed my folks and I killed your'n. I don't want nothin' from your breed. Get out!"

The woman dragged herself to her knees from where she had been flung and threw herself toward him.

"Get him out; get him out," she pleaded hysterically. "Oh, please, please. I'm his wife and he has two babies. Two babies waiting out there."

With a savage oath the big tool pusher flung up his hands. A flaming timber fell crashing across one corner of the room and, swearing horribly, he began to heave the timbers and wreckage off his enemy who had again closed his eyes.

With a mighty, muscle cracking surge he pulled him free, swung the limp body over his great shoulders like a light sack and jerked the woman to her feet.

"Wrap somethin' over your face," he ordered. "We're goin' out. Move, damn it!"

Carrying the unconscious man with one arm, half leading, half dragging the woman, he plunged back into the blazing hall, flames leaping about him, down the burning stairs that crashed as he leaped from the last step, blindly, indomitably, somehow into the street, on up to the deadline where the crowd milled and jammed behind the trucks and cordon of cable and men.

"Get a doc for this guy," he barked hoarsely, depositing the limp body gently on the floor of one of the trucks. "He's bad hurt. Get away woman! Ahhh!"

Thrusting the crying, thanksgiving woman aside, he shouldered his way savagely through the milling crowd, driving blindly on toward solitude, rain and darkness.

"I couldn't help it, Lance, baby," he sobbed. "Damn him, I couldn't do nothing else!"

Going on with

DUST *and* SUN

By CLEMENTS RIPLEY

QUETZALPAN, rich in tar pools, was practically run by the Pan American Asphalt Company—with general offices in New York—until the revolution of young Morales drove docile Señor Lopez from the presidency of the republic. No one knew how Morales had entered the country; he had fled Quetzalpan a few years before when his father's government was overthrown by the P. A. Company interests.

The P. A. was managed at Juarez, the seaport, by a frog faced man named Wales; and at the Ciudad Luiz plant by his assistant, Herrington. Just before the return of young Morales these two gentlemen had employed Jerry Maxton, soldier of fortune since 1918 in France, to arrest a revolutionary agitator. When the agitator resisted arrest, Maxton killed him, and he, José Ramirez, thereby became a martyr—and Maxton became known as his murderer and, in spite of his position as lieutenant in the president's guard, was thrown into jail to satisfy the populace.

In the Juarez jail he was joined by another prisoner—Patterson Standish, nephew of the chief owner of the P. A. A man who had called himself Patterson Standish had appeared at Ciudad Luiz and reported to Herrington; so Wales at Juarez accused the real Standish of being an imposter. Standish could not explain how he awoke drunk his first morning in Juarez, without his passport but with money intact, after the first night ashore with a shipboard friend, Pete Morrison. So he was thrown into the jail; happily, in the same cell with Maxton.

The two prisoners escaped, seized a boat from the waterfront, fled upriver to

A Novel of Revolution and Romance in Latin America

La Boca and rented horses to ride to Ciudad Luiz. On the highway, not far from La Boca, they were ambushed by revolutionists, but they managed to gallop onward, unhurt; though they departed from the Ciudad Luiz road to foil their pursuers. At sunset they reached an old, but pretentious, country house. The fire glowed in the fireplace; but the place was deserted. They soon discovered why. The owner, Don Santiago, had been robbed and murdered—and his corpse nailed to the wall.

Nevertheless, Maxton and Standish put their horses in the stable and spent the night. They were too weary to ride farther. The next morning they were seized and bound by a posse of natives, and sent under guard, charged with murder, to be delivered to the Revolutionary Committee of Aguilar.

CHAPTER XV

GOOD STEEL

AT THE end of half an hour's riding the little cavalcade stopped perforce where a freight train, drawn across the road, blocked the way. As the train crew was not visible and there seemed to be no immediate prospect of moving, the men settled themselves in their saddles, mopped their faces —for the sun was beginning to be hot— and rolled cigarets.

Standish took the opportunity to ask one of them whether his bonds might not be loosened a little. They cut his wrists, he explained.

The man stared. Then he broke into a laugh.

"*Jesús Maria,* he wants his hands untied. Says the thongs hurt him!"

They passed the jest back and forth among them, savoring it.

"His hands untied—*cel*"

"*Pues, sí,* we'll untie him at once, since he asks it."

"And would his Excellency like anything else? A feather pillow to ride on?"

"Without doubt he'll have to have a velvet covered rope, this one, so it won't burn his neck."

Standish flushed and set his face stolidly toward the train while the jest crackled in his ears and the four whooped shrilly at each new sally.

Presently, drawn by their noise, a man came out of the *cantina* nearby, a small, crossroads affair of brown adobe brick, and wanted to be let in on the joke.

Then the story of the murder of Don Santiago had to be told by each in turn, with endless interruptions and corroborations, and exclamations and questions on the part of the newcomer. In fine, it was such a story as had not come to a small crossroads *cantina* in many a day, and the tellers of it were immediately invited in to have a drink.

Thereupon arose the question of who was to stay outside with the prisoners, and for a little the discussion threatened to wreck the whole occasion, until the host, with admirable ingenuity, solved the difficulty.

"No one need stay outside," was his verdict. "Link the horses tail to tail. Thus, if one would go forward, the other must go backward, and in consequence, neither shall go at all. So, I have heard, the *Indios* of the mountain country tie their llamas. *Huy,* son of a thousand devils, stand over there! For, look you, if one goes forward the other goes backward —and now a thong around the tail—and such, by the will of heaven, is the nature of the llama that neither is willing to go backward by so much as a single step. And therefore, so I have heard, they stand for hours at a time. Now a knot through the hair which will not break—"

As he talked, he was skipping about the horses, stripping thongs from the saddles, pushing them into position, tying, until presently the thing was finished and the animals stood, lashed tail to tail.

"For, look you—" the newcomer stood back, admiring his handiwork—"if one desires to urge his horse forward, the other must go backward, and so, by the nature of things, which God in His wisdom has ordained, neither shall be able to go at all. And so no one need stay outside, and all shall be well, and presently, when this accursed train shall take itself out of your road, you may go on your journey the worse for nothing and the better for a drink of good brandy."

It was an invitation that the guards were not slow to accept. They dismounted and threw the reins over their horses' heads, and a moment later disappeared into the *cantina,* voluble in their admiration of their host's ingenuity.

"PROB'LY be there for the next half hour," Maxton said resignedly. "Well, Ace, no two ways about it. We're in a mess all right."

Standish agreed apathetically. Heat and pain and weariness seemed to be combining to make him light headed. He said—

"Will they feed us before they hang us, or whatever they're goin' to do?"

Maxton shifted in his saddle and leaned back, trying to ease the cramp in his elbows.

"Well, they haven't hanged us yet," he said, "although I'll admit it looks very, very much like it. If we're not the fellas that killed Don Santiago, we're a whole lot likely to be the ones that killed José Ramirez—and maybe both. Still, you never can tell. Anyhow, we've got to have a story when we get to Aguilar. What'll it be?"

"What'll it be?" Standish repeated the sentence dully, and instantly the thing began to sing itself through his head. *What'll it be when you are far away? Te-dum, te-dee, what'll it be—* No, that wasn't

right. Something wrong with it. *What'll it—*

He saw Maxton eying him curiously and he wrenched his mind back to the question. He said:

"Oh! Well, we've got to stick to the story I told Jiminez."

What'll it be when . . .

Maxton was saying:

"The one I gave 'em at La Boca, I guess. We were Henry Wilson and James Dorrance. Don't, for God's sake, forget those names."

Standish repeated them dully.

"Henry Wilson and James Dorrance—Henry Wilson and James Dorrance—Henry—"

"We've got the receipt for our boat—or Jiminez has. That bears out that much of the story, and the letter from the Café del Sol about the horses is evidence that we were goin' to San Luiz Obispo. Not that any of it'll be much good, but it's somethin'."

What'll it be when you— No, that wasn't it at all. Funny he couldn't remember. Sweat running down his face. He wished that he could wipe it off; he tried by hunching his shoulder against his cheek, and knocked his hat up so that the sun was in his eyes. Heat! Waves of it that beat like surf in his ears. Pain in his wrists and hands. Fingers swelled up like bananas. *Yes, we have no bananas, we have no—*

Why didn't they move that train? How long did they think they could block a public road anyway? That railroad was probably built by the P. A.; Wales said all the railroads in Quetzalpan were built by the P. A. Wales—green eyes. Have to speak to him about that. No, *not* about having green eyes—about blocking a public road. *What'll it be when you—*

A man got out of the cab of the locomotive and came toward the *cantina*. He wore blue overalls and a cap and slapped his leg with a pair of yellow gauntlets as he walked.

"Here comes the engineer for a drink," Maxton observed. "Now he'll have to hear about Don Santiago, and that'll take another quarter of an hour."

The horses switched and stamped restlessly. *What'll I do*—there it was. Now he had it. *What'll I do when you—* That rhymed. Now why couldn't he have thought of that before? The man was coming toward them, taking his time, and he had an overwhelming impulse to shout something at him to hurry him—so much so that when the man came up with them he gave way to it.

He called—

"Hey, when are you going to move that train?"

The engineer stopped. He glanced at them over his shoulder. Deliberately he swung around, planted his feet a little apart, thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and stared.

Then he spat and drawled—

"Well, damn me!"

THERE was something so unexpected and yet so familiar about it that Standish caught his breath. He said:

"My Lord! I didn't realize that you were an American."

The man said:

"Sure I'm American. What the hell did you think I was—one o' these spicks? An' so far's that train's concerned, I'll move it when I please. That suit ya?" He nodded, and repeated, "I'm runnin' that damn' train, an' I'll move it when I please."

Standish said nothing. There seemed, in fact, to be nothing more to be said. The man walked around them slowly, his hands in his pockets. Then he asked—

"You both Americans?"

Maxton said—

"Yes."

"How come you to be all tied up like that then?"

He spoke in an irritated, aggrieved way, as if their being tied up was a personal affront which they ought to explain.

Maxton said wearily:

"We're prisoners. They're takin' us in to Aguilar."

"What for?"

"To hang us, I suppose."

"To hang ya!" the other echoed. "Well, damn me! That's a big order, ain't it? What you done—killed somebody?"

"They say so—if it's any of your business."

"That ain't no way to talk," the other reproved him. "Who?"

"A man they call Don Santiago," Maxton explained with wearied patience. "I don't know his last name."

The other spat.

"Ol' fella lives 'bout four mile over thataway?" He jerked his thumb in the direction from which they had come. "Mean him?"

"I reckon so," Maxton said. "I don't know. You know him?"

"Seen him round a time or two. So Don Santiago's dead. Well, I never thought he was much account anyhow. Say, what you got them horses all tied together like that for?"

Something inside Standish's head seemed to snap. He laughed hysterically.

"Because, look you, if one horse goes forward the other goes back, and in consequence, by the will of—" He stopped suddenly, conscious that he was not saying what he had meant to say at all.

The railroad man eyed him disapprovingly.

"This ain't a time to laugh, young fella," he admonished him. "Think if I was goin' to get hung I'd be laughin' like that?" Standish held himself rigid lest he go off again.

Maxton said:

"Pull yourself together, Ace." To the man he explained:

"We're both kind of light headed, I reckon. We've had one meal and about four hours' sleep out of the last forty-eight, and these thongs are cuttin' our wrists off."

The man stepped around to where he could get a better view of the lashings.

"Well hell's sweet delight! Say, how long you fellas been tied up thataway?"

"Since last night," Maxton told him.

"Hell, your hands are all swole up like a mess o' hams." He spoke accusingly. "An' nothin' to eat? Say, that's no way to do." He spat, nodded thoughtfully, and added, "No way a-tall. And Don Santiago's dead. Well, these spicks, there's such a slew of 'em that one don't make any special difference."

He walked around them again, still staring, and then demanded suddenly—

"Say, what would you boys do if you was loose?"

Maxton said:

"You cut us loose and you'll see. We'll be down that road and out of sight before you can count ten."

The words were spoken in an ordinary tone, but there was an underlying tensity in it that jerked Standish back to reality. He held his breath.

THE RAILROAD man looked at them critically for an instant. Then he said, placidly:

"You're a liar. You wouldn't do nothin' of the sort. Why, if you was to ride out on 'em like that, they'd have you again within twenty-four hours. These revoluters is all over this part o' the country, thicker'n flies on a slop bucket." He paused, and spat decisively.

"Nossir—what you'd do, you'd crawl inta that gondola yonder, an' I'd snap this damn' train outa here so quick it'd give you deleerious tremens. That's what you'd do."

As he spoke he dug a great jackknife out of his pocket and glanced swiftly at the door of the *cantina*.

"I got this knife off'n a nigger in Saint Looey in '98," he observed thoughtfully as he stepped in behind Standish. "Damn me! They sure had you fellas tied up for fair."

He busied himself an instant. Then there was a quick tug, and Standish felt his hands free.

"Keep 'em there," the man cautioned sharply as he would have moved his arms. "Stay just like you are. Think I want to get in trouble with them spick guards o' yours? Hell's sweet delight! I never see such a mess o' tyin' in all my born days. There—now your feet's loose. Stay just

like y'are. Don't move a damn' inch."

Standish's head whirled, dizzy with the sudden rush of hope. The man moved about them with apparent casualness, cutting, slashing, talking steadily.

"Huh, them spicks! Look at your hands, all swole up like that. Nothin' to eat for twenty-four hours. Ought t' have better sense. First thing I seen you boys, I says to myself, 'Damn me,' I says—there!"

He made one last slash and the final thong that held the horses together parted. "Good steel in this knife," he observed. "Nigger was dead, too. Now you listen to what I tell ya. You stay just like y' are—keep your horses just like they are—keep your hands behind ya. Me, I'll get over to the train. I'll start her easy, and just as quick as she starts to roll, you whirl them damn' horses round and go like hell for that gondola. Swing on to it, and there y'are. Un'stand?

"All right, here I go." He nodded, spat, and made off in the direction of the locomotive.

Standish kept his eyes fixed on the car. For the moment he hardly felt the pain of returning circulation in his hands and wrists. Once he glanced nervously over his shoulder at the door of the *cantina*, but there was no one in sight.

Maxton whispered—

"Tell me when she moves." He was facing the other way, with his back to the train.

The locomotive began to puff—great, explosive blasts—and Standish thought:

"My Lord, it's all up with us. That'll bring 'em out sure."

But when he looked back again there was no sign of the guards. He had a curious sensation of weighing nothing, of bring able to float off into space. He took his lower lip between his teeth and bit it, and the pain helped to clear his head.

Then, so smoothly that for an instant he thought his eyes were fooling him, the cars began to move.

"Now!" he said sharply, and dug in his heels.

He saw Maxton snatch at his reins and whirl his horse, and then he was riding for the train with the other man just behind him.

They had less than forty yards to go, but before they had covered it, the train was gathering speed. He reached for the side of the gondola, clutched it, felt his horse swerve from under him, and scrambled aboard. Maxton landed beside him. A quick glance over the side showed the *cantina* vomiting excited men. Then a lurch of the train threw them to the floor and the yells of the guards were drowned in the rattle of wheels.

CHAPTER XVI

GALLANTRY

"*CLICKETY-clack! Clickety-clack!* They won't get us *back* . . ."

"And what'n hell d'you boys figure to do now?"

Standish heard the words dimly above the clatter of the train and wrenched himself out of a sort of rhythmical trance. Maxton and the engineer, who had introduced himself as Bill O'Day, were squatting on their heels, their backs braced against the sides of the car. He himself was lying full length on the floor.

Maxton said—

"I don't know."

At the moment he was engaged in rubbing circulation back into his swollen hands and wrists.

O'Day looked at him reproachfully.

"That's no way to talk," he said. "No way a-tall. If you don't know what you're gonna do, how the hell you gonna do it? Where you want to go?"

"We want to go to Ciudad Luiz," Standish put in suddenly. "There's a man there that they think is me." He stopped, conscious that this did not sound right. "But he isn't," he added by way of explanation.

"Huh?" O'Day turned to Maxton inquiringly. "What the hell's he talkin' 'bout?"

"Oh, just an idea he's got," Maxton turned it off. "But we are heading for

Ciudad Luiz." He pressed his hands against the floor of the car, trying to ease the pain.

O'Day said:

"That's more like it. But how you figure to get to Ciudad Luiz? No railroad there."

"I know it. We'll have to get hold of some horses some way and ride."

O'Day shook his head.

"I never could see no pleasure to ridin' a horse myself," he observed. "Me, I got nothin' good to say about any of 'em that I've ever seen. Still, Ciudad Luiz is a hundred fifty miles if it's a inch, an' damn' if I wouldn't want to ride on somethin' if I was goin' there. Well, now the question is—how you gonna get any horses? You got any money?"

Maxton shook his head.

"They took our money," he said, and the other spat and nodded.

"They would. Got any guns? No? Well, if you ain't a coupla babes in a woods. How you figure to go round a country that's all revoluted up thisaway with no money? How you figure to get any money if y' ain't got any gun?

"Now I'll tell you what you do," he went on. "You say they saw you get aboard here? Well, it don't matter. Even a spick could have figured that out anyhow. Now if they got any sense, they'll chase on up to San Benito—'tain't over a mile an' a half from where you got aboard—an' have the operator to wire down to Aguilar to have you took off." He wagged his head thoughtfully. "Nossir, what you gotta do, you gotta get off this damn' train before we get to Aguilar."

Maxton nodded.

"That's a cinch," he agreed. ""Aguilar is no place for us right now. I suppose you can slow down a little and let us jump?"

O'Day drew himself up and spat regally.

"I'm runnin' this damn' train," he announced emphatically, "an' I can slow it down when an' where I please. When *an'* where," he repeated, and spat again.

"But you jump off anywheres along here," he went on, "an' what happens? You get picked up quicker'n you can say 'hell's sweet delight'—that's what happens. They'll be lookin' for you all along the line down this way, an' you with your wrists all cut up like that. Damn, they sure did a job tyin' you fellas."

Maxton said:

"We'll have to chance that. We can't go into Aguilar. That's sure poison. We'll lie up somewhere near the line today and make a break for it tonight."

O'DAY ruminated for a moment. Then he said placidly:

"You're a liar. What you're gonna do, you're gonna do this. Down here in about fifteen minutes now, we'll pass the up freight, No. 4. You're gonna hop her an' ride her."

"She'll be waiting at the siding?"

"If she ain't you're gonna see the damndest smash you ever see. Yeah, she'll be there. She carries a string o' empty boxes goin' up. Well, I'll slow down, an' you pick you a empty an' jump, see?"

"What if the train crew see us?"

O'Day said:

"Don't you go makin' objections, young fella. That ain't no way to do. Most likely they won't nobody see you, an' you crawl into a box an' slam the door, an' there y'are. But if they do, you tell 'em you're a friend o' mine. Friend o' Bill O'Day's, see? Most likely it won't get ya anything, but it's worth tryin'."

"Anything's worth tryin'," Maxton said. "The main thing is to get away from Aguilar. You certainly pulled us out of a mess this trip," he added feelingly.

O'Day spat accurately at a rivet head.

"Pleased t' oblige," he murmured. "Damn me if I'll have any such doins—right along the right o' way, too. Spicks, hell!" He jerked his shoulders disgustedly. "I been on this run four years now and I've yet to see one of 'em could fire an engine right 'thout you stood in behind and booted his tail every fifteen minutes. That there Estaban that's up in the cab now— I been workin' on him for eighteen months and he's just as liable as not to

pile us up right now, any minute. Go to sleep with his eyes wide open, he will, an' ya gotta wake him up with a spanner. But looka here. Damn me if I didn't about forget you fellas was hungry."

HE MADE his way back over the cars and presently reappeared with a couple of thick sandwiches and a bottle of water, and said:

"Here. Eat hearty an' save the water for today. You'll need it."

Standish struggled up into a sitting position. His skin felt queer, and his mouth was dry and had an evil taste. The thought of eating nauseated him. However, the rush of fresh air cleared his head a little and he managed to gulp down a sandwich. He felt a little better after it, and the change of position seemed to break up the rhythm of the wheels that pounded through his head.

He said:

"You've been awfully good to us. I hope it won't get you into any trouble."

O'Day curled back his lips and squirted a stream of tobacco juice between his teeth.

"I'm runnin' this train," he asserted, "an' I'll run it how I please, whether I'm runnin' it for the P. A. or for these here revolutors. If a coupla bums hops a gondola, that ain't my funeral, is it? If it is, it's news to me."

"But what about cutting us loose?"

"Well, so far as I know, nobody seen me. But if they did, I'll swear I didn't and there y'are. My swearin's just as good as anybody's, an' a damn' sight better, 'f you ask me. There's plenty spicks round here, but how many engineers with first class certificates you think they is in this dump?" He paused impressively. "They's three, that's how many. Well then?"

Standish said no more. So far as he could see, O'Day was entirely capable of taking care of himself.

A few minutes later he peered over the edge of the car and announced:

"Here comes the sidin'. I'll go up front an' slow down. So long now—an' take care y'selfs."

The rhythm of the wheels began to slacken. In another moment they jolted over a switch, and Maxton said:

"We're gettin' there, Ace. Look sharp now!"

A string of empties slid past. He got to his feet and crouched by the side of the gondola, clinging to the rail. Maxton pointed to a car half way down the string. As they glided up to it they were hardly more than crawling.

There was no one in sight. He saw Maxton go over the side and scrambled after him. An instant later they had slipped across and climbed into the empty car.

Maxton shut the door. Presently there was a crashing jolt—another—a series of sharp jerks. Then the train gathered speed and the wheels settled into their pounding refrain.

STANDISH dozed, twitching and jerking — a hot, heavy sleep, full of dreams through which ran the steady, sickening rhythm. Once he woke to find it stopped and to see Maxton, a dim form kneeling in the crack of light from the door. He heard him whisper:

"Quiet. There's a coupla fellas with rifles out here."

He dozed again, and presently they were jolting and swaying on in the hot darkness.

Sometimes he was half conscious, lying in a heavy stupor in which the beat of the wheels and the heat and the thick, druggy smell of tar and sheep dip mixed themselves in his brain until he hardly knew which was which. Then a draught of cool air brought him wide awake at last, and he saw that Maxton had the door open and that it was already dusk.

He crawled over and gulped in deep breaths of the freshness. Maxton said—

"Feelin' better?"

He answered—

"Uh-huh."

He dragged himself up so that he could

sit against the wall. His head was clearer, and the coolness was grateful to his hot skin, but he was weak, and his mouth tasted vilely.

"Where are we?" he wanted to know.

They were running through a treeless country now, gently rolling grasslands, and away on the horizon there was a jagged line, purple in the last glow of the sunset, that looked like mountains.

Maxton said:

"We're a hell of a long ways from where we started. I can tell you that much. I haven't been able to see the names of any of these towns, but we're somewheres up east, on a guess."

"Up east? Up where the tar pools are?"

"Yup—"grimly. "And barrin' Aguilar, it's about the worst place we could be. They're very, very hot on the revolution up this way. Howsoever, that can't be helped now."

Standish did not answer. For the moment he did not much care where they were or where they were going so long as he could sit here and drink in the coolness of the evening. A dull lethargy had come over him, so much so that he could not even bring himself to speculate on the future.

Then across the plain a string of curving lights appeared, and Maxton got to his feet.

"There's a town, Ace," he announced. "If we stop here, this is where you and I make a play at gettin' off."

The words jerked Standish out of his comfortable blankness.

"Say, what's the idea of that?" he protested. He was suddenly appalled at the prospect of leaving this shelter and plunging back into the harried existence of the past forty-eight hours. "Can't we stay here till morning anyhow?"

Maxton said:

"What's the matter with you, fella? Every mile we go in this direction is a mile away from Ciudad Luiz. We'd have been out of here before now, only every time we've stopped there's been a gang around, and we couldn't risk it in daylight."

In spite of himself Standish saw the reason in that. He said:

"Well, all right. I don't see what difference it makes, though—with no horses, and no money—"

"More ways of gettin' horses than buyin' 'em, fella. You got to remember that this is war, and in war anything goes. It's Ciudad Luiz, and that right soon, or our necks."

THE TRAIN clattered over switches, slowed and ground to a stop. Standish got to his feet and peered out of the car door. They were in a freight yard. Directly opposite stood another string of box cars, and a little farther down the line, where a gas flame flickered and flared out of an iron pipe, a half naked crew were unloading sacks into a shed.

Maxton looked left and right, cautiously, and then slipped out.

"Wait here a second. I'm goin' to reconnoitre."

Standish was dully glad of the respite. There was a queer buzzing in his ears and the skin over his face felt tight and drawn.

An undertone came up to him out of the darkness:

"All right. Come on down."

He swung himself to the ground. Even that slight exertion made his head swim.

"Fence round the yards — sentries posted—"

The words penetrated his mind, but somehow they did not seem to connect themselves with anything. He was thinking that with this curious lightness in his feet, if he were to stand on tiptoe and give a little push he could float right off into space.

"Only way out's through the freight shed," Maxton was saying. "Pull your hat down and look dumb. Let me do the talkin'."

He brought his mind back to it mechanically, and followed toward the loading platform.

Brown bodies, glistening in the flicker

of the gas flare. Heat. Shouted orders. A ceaseless stream of men, trotting into the shed, bowed under the weight of two hundred pound sacks, trotting back to the car shoulders free and swinging. A ragged sentry at the wide door that led to the street.

A harassed and sweating fat man in trousers and shirt stood under the light, checking the contents of the car on a yellow pad.

Maxton approached him humbly with his hat pulled over his eyes and his shoulders slumped. He spread his hands placatingly.

"If your Excellency could use two more men—"

The fat man jerked an irritated elbow and went on with his checking.

"Two strong men, your Excellency. Big men. Able to lift great weights like nothing at all.

"*Ce*—no. Get away."

Maxton's shoulders sagged lower, and his voice took on the whine of the professional beggar.

"Have pity on the poor, your Excellency. Nothing to eat all day—"

The fat man turned on him savagely. He wagged his forefinger violently in front of his nose.

"No! *Jesús Maria*, no I tell you. Get away. Get outside and stay outside." He hunched an angry shoulder and went back to his checking.

Maxton shrugged with hopeless resignation.

"I thank your Excellency for your Excellency's great courtesy," he whined in the customary formula, and turned toward the door.

The sentry had heard and seen. Besides, as he understood his orders, they were intended to keep people out rather than to keep them in. He stood aside as they came up.

"*Ce* a hard man, that," he sympathized in an undertone.

Standish hung his head.

"The world is hard when the belly is empty," Maxton quoted mournfully, and they passed out into the street.

THE SOUND of wheels still pounded through Standish's head, and he could still feel the lurch and sway of the train. The gas flares danced and swung. He straightened them out with an effort and asked—

"Now where?"

"Most anywhere out of here," Maxton told him. "These up East towns are bad medicine for us. I've done strike duty up all through here, and after that José Ramirez business . . . "

José Ramirez? José Ra—oh, of course. He remembered now. Curious, his having forgotten that. He passed his hand over his forehead. The skin was hot and dry, and that queer feeling of lightness . . .

He had a sudden, dismaying thought, and he twitched his shoulders as if he could throw it off that way. Must be that he was just tired, of course; that and not having anything to eat. Aloud he said—

"We've got to get some horses, I suppose." He wanted to get to some place where he could lie down and sleep.

Maxton considered.

"I've been studyin' about that. There ought to be some tied in front of some of these *cantinas*. We better get on up the street and see what we can find."

Standish, whose mind had already flown off at a tangent, agreed absently. After what they had been through, stealing a couple of horses was no more than a minor incident.

They had crossed the stretch in front of the freight sheds by now and had entered a street, lighted half way up by a gas flare. At the farther end there was a yellow glow, which Maxton said was probably the plaza.

"All these towns are built just alike," he remarked. He added, as they passed a group of men with rifles, "All it takes to make a revolutionary is a gun and a bandoleer. A lot of 'em will have ridden in from the country to see the fun, and they'll be doin' a lot of pretty earnest drinkin'. We ought to be able to pick up a couple of *caballos*. Say, listen to 'em! Plenty revolution here."

THE CROWD had become noisier as they went forward, and now from the plaza ahead there was a burst of yelling and several shots.

"Tunin' up! The party's young yet, but give 'em another forty-eight hours and a little more hooch, and there'll be doin's." He broke off abruptly. "Say, wouldn't you think a woman would have more sense than to be out here alone this time of night?"

Standish had noticed her before he spoke—a slim figure a hundred feet or so ahead. She had a shawl over her head, like the peon women, but her walk, quick and clean cut, and the trim slenderness of her figure against the light at the end of the street, gave a different impression.

She was walking fast, evidently apprehensive and anxious to get home, and out of the street, which was getting noisier and more disorderly as they came nearer the plaza. For a moment Standish lost her in the shadow by the wall. Then he saw her again as she stepped into the shaft of light from the open door of a wine shop.

He heard a burst of maudlin laughter and saw her shrink aside and quicken her pace. Then there was a shadow in the doorway and a man lurched out behind her. He had a glimpse of him in the light, a squat, ragged peon, with the inevitable cartridge belt of the revolutionary army, obviously drunk, and heard his:

"*Pues*, wait a minute, little one. What's your hurry?"

She hurried on without answering, and he shouted something to his friends inside and turned and followed her unsteadily.

"Now she's got into something," Maxton observed judicially. "Well, she asked for it."

Standish quickened his pace. The man had caught up with her now, and was making playful clutches at her shawl. She was walking as fast as she could, without turning her head.

"I don't like that," he said. "He's frightening her."

Maxton laughed shortly, derisively.

"She's lucky it ain't tomorrow night," was his comment. "He'd do worse than frighten her. Ace, this thing is tunin' up for a big time. I know the signs."

Standish made no answer. He was intent upon what was going on ahead. The girl was still keeping ahead of her tormentor; but presently he grew bolder and came up alongside, crowding her toward the wall. Then he lurched in front of her and forced her to a stop. She tried to slip around him and continue on her way. He caught her by the arms and pushed her back into the shadow.

"You fool!" Maxton gripped his friend's shoulder and jerked him to a halt. "What do you want to mix in for? What do you think she's out here for this time of night?"

Standish hesitated uncertainly. The lights from farther up the street were swimming before his eyes, and the blood was pounding in his head. He felt as light as air.

Maxton was shaking him by the shoulder.

"This is no time to get into a row. Pull yourself together, fella."

There was sense in that. He recognized it.

"All right—" he was beginning, when he caught the sounds of a struggle ahead and heard the man laugh.

That laugh wiped everything else out of his mind. Before Maxton could stop him, he had thrown off his hand and was running toward them.

THE SOLDIER had the girl pressed back against the wall. He drove into him with his shoulder, and the man staggered, grunted and caught himself by clutching at a door jamb.

Standish himself hardly felt the impact. His head was a merry-go-round of whirling lights, and there seemed to be a brass band playing inside it. He said—

"If I can help you—"

She gave a little gasp.

"Thank you!"

"You're American!" he said, filled with a dull surprise. For the moment the drunken soldier had gone entirely out of his mind.

But the man was not to be dismissed so easily. He staggered back and thrust in between them.

Almost mechanically, without taking his eyes from the slim figure against the wall, Standish gave him a back handed shove that sent him off again.

"If I can help you—" he repeated. He was conscious that Maxton had come up and was pulling at his arm. He shook him off irritably.

The soldier had taken a little backward run and caught his balance again. He stood weaving uncertainly, apparently at a loss to know exactly what had happened. He said, "Somebody pushed me!" in a tone of plaintive wonderment, and then, with a sudden spurt of anger, "You pushed me. Ha! You pushed *me*, a soldier of the revolution!"

Standish was conscious that the man had lurched toward them again, and that Maxton was holding him off, arguing, trying to soothe him. He dismissed that angle of it from his mind, magnificently. He wanted to say something reassuring to the girl, but he could not make the words come straight. Everything was spinning in his head.

The protests of the soldier rose louder.

"But why does he push me? Why does he push a soldier of the revolution? Ha! You think I don't know? It is because he is a spy of the accursed Lopez!"

He lowered his voice and hissed the word. Maxton said:

"You are mistaken, señor. He is a patriot, like ourselves."

"Like ourselves? Then why does he push a soldier of the revolution? Why does he— I know! A Lopezista—and you are another. Lopezista—Lopezista—" his voice rose suddenly to a yell. "Lo-peze-*e*-sta!"

"But, señor—"

"Silence, Lopezista!" He was in full swing now. "All three of you. I know. You can't fool me."

He stepped back suddenly and jerked out a heavy revolver.

"All Lopezistas must be shot!"

There was a little, quick gasp from the girl and her hands went to her breast.

"For God's sake, don't scream," Maxton said over his shoulder.

"I'm not going to scream," she said weakly.

The man was swaying unsteadily, flourishing his revolver. Maxton stepped closer to him.

"You are making a mistake," he said, and held out his hand. "You would better give that to me."

The thing was done so matter of factly that for a moment it seemed as though the man was going to comply. Then he backed off, shaking his head.

"Ha! You thought you could fool me. If you're not a Lopezista," he added with triumphant cunning, "let me hear you shout '*Viva la libertad*'."

"*Pues, sí. Viva la libertad!*"

It seemed to take the wind out of his sails, but only for a moment. He advanced on Standish.

"You too."

Standish felt the muzzle against his ribs and came back to himself.

"Very well. *Viva la libertad!*"

"*Viva la Revolución*," the other insisted. "*Viva Morales.*"

"*Viva*—" he was beginning obediently when Maxton stepped in front of him.

IT WAS done so quickly that he never knew how it happened. Maxton's arms went up and the soldier sat down heavily. His revolver clattered on the pavement.

Maxton snatched it up.

"Come on. Don't run. Walk!"

Then they were footing it up the street with the girl between them, and Maxton was saying—

"My God, Red, how come you're out here this time of night?"

That struck Standish as curious, but before he could put his mind on it the soldier began to shout after them.

He looked back and saw him outlined against the light. He had scrambled up and was staring after them, weaving unsteadily on his feet. An instant later he started in their direction.

"Lopezistas! Lopeze-*e*-stas!" They could hear him, running, stumbling, caroming off the wall. "Lopeze-*e*-stas!"

"Damn!" Maxton snapped. "He'll mess us up yet. Listen to him."

"Lopeze-*e*-*e*-stas! We are attacked! Spies! *Lopeze-e-stas!*"

Already his clamor was drawing attention. Some one called out from across the street to know what was the matter. Two men whom they passed turned to stare after them. A window went up.

"*Lopeze-e-estas!*"

The shouts multiplied. Men began to come out of the wine shop farther down. There was a sound of running feet and some one yelled:

"Where? Where are the Lopezistas?"

Maxton stopped abruptly and let go of the girl's arm. He gave Standish a slap on the shoulder.

"Chase along, Ace," he told him. "Get Red home and keep her there. I'll keep the gun."

He gave her a little push and stepped into the shelter of a doorway.

"This place is made to order. Step along, you two, and give my best to Don Diego. I'm in this and you're not."

Before Standish could collect his wits to protest, the girl had darted forward and seized Maxton's wrist.

"No, Jerry—no!" She was breathless, panting, dragging at him. "Oh, don't be so stupid! It's only a few doors now. *Jerry!*"

"How far—"

"Only a little way. Oh, *do* hurry! It's not a hundred yards. Hurry!"

Maxton caught her arm, and there was a sudden note of exultation in his voice.

"We'll make it then. Snap into it, Ace!"

Standish took her arm on the other side. His head was whirling and none of it seemed to mean anything. Then they were running, and people were turning to stare and there was a confused shouting, as chaotic as the sparks that spun and crackled inside his head.

There was a sudden stop at a heavy, nail studded door. The girl had half collapsed against it, and he could hear her rapid breathing. She was whispering:

"Hurry. Hurry! Oh, *hurry!*"

Maxton was pounding on the door with the butt of the revolver. The street was full of shouting.

A little square shaft of light shot out as a grille opened. He had a glimpse of a startled face, heard an exclamation. The door swung open—slammed behind them.

STANDISH sank on to a bench. He had an impression of dark paneling, of lights burning dimly. The shouting from the street was a murmur now, dulled by the heavy door.

A man came down the hall, a tall man, erect, with a fine, lean face and white hair and mustache. The girl ran to him with a little cry and he put his arm around her, patted her shoulder. The clamor from the street grew louder.

She was talking to him now, quick, breathless words tumbling over each other. He was shaking hands with Maxton. Maxton was offering the revolver, butt first. The tall man was shaking his head.

There was a pounding on the door, sudden, peremptory.

The tall man stepped to the door and swung it open. The roar of the crowd swelled with abrupt menace and then died to a muttering. He was speaking. Standish caught words and phrases that swirled through the chaos in his head.

"Friends, not spies . . . drunken fool of a peon. I am answerable for them." Presently he closed the door again and turned back to the hall.

It seemed to Standish that he ought to say something, to make some acknowledgment. He got to his feet. The room tilted in a slow arc and righted itself again, and he steadied himself with his hand on the wall.

He heard himself speaking vaguely—"If the señor will pardon—"

The man looked at him for an instant, curiously. Then he took a quick step forward, and as he did, Standish let go the wall and pitched full length on to the floor.

CHAPTER XVII

FEVER

DAYS and nights flickered into each other in a kaleidoscope of black and white. He was in the swamp again, riding endlessly through a hot, green tunnel that twisted and coiled and shifted under his feet so that his head swam and he was sick and dizzy. He lay in a sweating, clattering darkness that swayed and swung — *clickety-clickety-clickety-clack-clickety-clack* . . . they won't get us *back* . . .

Then colored lights spun around him with sickening swiftness, and he was toiling over great, icy mountains where a chill wind whimpered, and the cold shook him, and he was alone, out on the roof of the world. He would hurry with panicky, laboring haste until suddenly he stumbled over the edge of things and fell through a cold, screaming darkness. He struggled then (that was when they wrapped him in wet sheets to hold the fever down) and they laughed and held his arms and pushed him down—down . . .

And always, in the swamp or in the mountains, or in the tortuous town where every street was a blind alley and the crowds clamored and hooted after him, he must hurry—hurry—because there was a place called Ciudad Luiz and he must get there before something vaguely terrible happened.

He saw himself in Ciudad Luiz sometimes, moving about an office, doing things at a desk, and for the moment he was satisfied, until he realized that this was not himself at all but somebody who looked like him, and that They had tricked him again.

They were always trying to block him—holding him—screaming into his ears. The only thing that it was safe to trust was the Red Glow. The Red Glow could lead him through the cold or the hot dark, or the coiling roads of the swamp, but more often than not he lost it and fell into a horror of despair before he saw it again and hurried toward it, half a world away. He knew that if he could only follow it he could get to Ciudad Luiz, and then he could explain some vague thing and everything would be all right.

There were intervals when he realized dimly that he was in a bed in the middle of a vast, white space, and then he knew that the Red Glow was not a guide at all, but a mass of red hair. It belonged with the slim figure in white that moved about the room, and the hands that changed wet bandages and mixed medicines that swirled and tinkled under the spoon and tasted vilely afterward.

There was a tall man, too, very erect, with white hair and a fine, lean face, who came to the door sometimes. And there was always Maxton. So that was all right, and he sank back into a heavy, drugged sleep.

ONE AFTERNOON he opened his eyes and yawned and stretched, and instantly things slipped back into their proper places. He remained awake.

He lay for a little while, getting his bearings. The ceiling was a ceiling now and not a vast, blinding sky. Presently his eyes began to take in the details of the room—a large room, white walled, with high, arched windows, deeply recessed. The windows had jalousies, and the afternoon sun, slanting through one of them, made a pattern of little golden bars on the white wall. Another was open, and he could see green leaves and a patch of sky.

He looked down at the bed. High carved posts and a white counterpane. His hands lay outside the covers, very white and bony. They puzzled him a little, and he had to move one of them before he could realize that they belonged to him.

Then he turned his head and saw Maxton sitting by the head of the bed. That puzzled him too, for he was clean and shaved and his white linens were spotless. He was reading, a cigaret drooping from the corner of his mouth. He watched him a moment and then said—

"Hello."

Maxton glanced up, grinned and shut his book.

"Well, look who's come to! How you feelin'?"

Standish thought that over a moment.

"All right, I guess," he decided. And then, appreciatively, "This is an awfully nice room."

"That ain't the proper thing for you to say when you first come to," Maxton reproved him. "You ought to say, 'Where am I?' It's in all the books."

"Well, where am I then?"

"At the Estancia Espinoza. It's about ten miles out of Encarnación, but you wouldn't remember comin' out here, I guess. Say, how much do you remember about that night anyhow?"

"Not much." Standish frowned. "There was a girl—"

"I'll say there was," Maxton told him, with a queer, repressed exuberance. "Ace, if we're not the fools for luck. D'you know who that was? It was my girl that I been tellin' you about—you remember. She'd been out drivin' in the carriage, and they smashed an axle. That's why she was walkin' home through the streets that way. God, if it hadn't been for you—"

"I'm awfully glad," Standish said.

He was not very sure yet what he was being glad about, but he thought from Maxton's expression that it was what he ought to say.

"You don't remember about that drunk?" Maxton was asking anxiously. "Or about Don Diego bringin' you out here after you passed out there in his town house in Encarnación?"

Standish digested that a moment. He seemed now to have a recollection of a carriage and a hot, white road.

"Who's Don Diego?" he wanted to know.

"My goodness gracious, fella, don't you remember anything? He's the man I've been tellin' you about all along, the one that adopted my girl. And I didn't even know we were anywhere near Encarnación! He's the man that owns this place—" Maxton swept his cigaret in an encompassing gesture—"and one grand old file."

Standish accepted that without comment. His mind was at work, sorting a tangled skein of recollection, trying to adjust itself to this new turn of affairs.

He said—

"Do you suppose he'd lend us horses to get to Ciudad Luiz?"

Instead of answering, Maxton raised his voice.

"Hey, Red!" he called. "The fella's awake and he wants to borrow a horse."

From somewhere close at hand a girl's voice answered:

"Awake? Don't give him anything till I come. I'll be right there."

Maxton grinned excitedly.

"That's Red, fella," he exulted. "Wait till you see her."

THERE was a quick, light step in the hall. An instant later the owner of the voice appeared in the door.

Standish had an impression of young, vivid slenderness, of clear, gray eyes, set wide apart, and of a wide, sweet mouth. He noticed these things subconsciously. What his eyes and mind fixed on was her hair—thick, almost too heavy for the slenderness of her neck, and smooth with the sheen of burnished copper.

"The Red Glow!" he murmured almost aloud, and stared until Maxton jogged the bed and said:

"Here she is. Act nice, now, fella."

She smiled, her lips curving in friendliness, and came across to the bed. She laid her hand against his forehead, a coolly impersonal touch, and yet with a strong, sweet vitality in it. He relaxed.

"The fever's gone," she announced. "That's splendid."

He accepted that as he accepted everything else—the clean bed and the room and the girl herself with her red hair and firm, slender hands—happily but incuriously. He was too weak to puzzle very much over things. Just lie there and drink in the delicious comfort of it all without bothering to wonder.

Presently he said—

"I've been sick, haven't I?"

Maxton grinned. He seemed irrepressibly exuberant with a happy excitement that Standish had never dreamed of before in connection with him.

"You've had about as pretty a mess of jungle fever as I care about seein'," he told him. "Five days of bein' like you been is a plenty."

"Five days?" Standish glanced at the girl, startled and troubled. "And you've taken care of me all that time? My Lord! I must have given you any amount of trouble."

She shook her head.

"Oh, no," she disclaimed swiftly. "It hasn't been anything—really. Please don't think about that."

Maxton said:

"Well, depends on what you'd call anything, Red. You might tell him about the night he had the heeby-jeebies and hopped up in his little ol' nightshirt and started for Ciudad Luiz by way of the window. She had to fight you for a solid half hour that night, fella. Me, I'd say that was something."

Standish stared at her with sudden panic.

"Did I do that?" he questioned, blushing. "Honestly?"

"Of course not," she told him emphatically. "He's making it worse, of course. It really wasn't anything. You got up, and—I got you back to bed again; that was all." And to Maxton, "What do you want to say things like that for, Jerry? They worry him."

Maxton blew a cloud of smoke.

"Aw, Red, you're always takin' the joy out of life. Look at the blush of health I've brought to his wan cheeks—to say nothin' of clear up to his hair. Well, anyhow, Ace, you were very, very lurid once in a while."

Standish said—

"I'm awfully sorry, Miss—"

"Reed," she supplied. "But last names are too absurd when anybody's been so—well, intimate for the past five days. My name is Faith," she added. "And you haven't anything to be sorry for at all. You've been as good and quiet as anybody could be with a temperature of a hundred and four."

She smiled. When she did that Standish found himself smiling too.

He said:

"Faith then. You've been wonderful to me, and I can't ever thank you enough, you and Don Diego. Is he the tall old gentleman with white hair?"

She nodded.

"Yes, that's Don Diego."

Maxton added:

"And let me tell you, Ace, they don't come any finer. Say, he used to command the guard, back in the days when they were fightin' Morales—this fella's father. That was a regiment then. I'd rather have been a buck private under Don Diego than a colonel under Lopez."

"He's sweet," Faith said. "And now you mustn't talk any more, because I want you to be rested when he comes to see you. He'll be so happy to know you're getting on so well."

He watched her move about the room, adjusting the shutters, quick and slim and sure. No wonder Maxton had wanted to talk about her. Where the sun touched her hair it glinted like metal. Presently he lay back and closed his eyes and let his mind wander, picking up the details of things with a queer, incurious content. Maxton, clean and shaved and spotless in white. The touch of cool linen. Clear gray eyes, cool like water. From somewhere in the house he heard a lazy, happy laugh. There was a cooing of doves and the faint, silvery tinkle of sheep bells, and when the breeze lifted the curtains there was an aromatic, spicy tang in the air.

Slender hands and a slim, glad body—masses and coils of hair, red like a flame . . .

"Jerry," he told himself with conscious emphasis, "is a fool for luck."

CHAPTER XVIII

A DANGEROUS AFFINITY

HE DOZED and woke and dozed again. He ate the broths and the savory, steaming dishes that the little, wide eyed *criada* brought up to him. He drank in the peace and contentment and the quiet friendliness of the house, and day by day he felt his strength flow back into him.

Long talks with Faith helped. She had a sweetness, he found, that was like cool mountain water, and a quaint directness like the directness of a fine boy. And Don Diego came to see him, grave with a stately courtesy behind which he could sense the clean simplicity and kindness of the man himself.

"He's like—well, he always makes me think of a sword blade, somehow," he told Faith hesitantly. He was a little self-conscious for fear she should miss his meaning and think him absurd.

She was sitting in a big chair beside the bed. She nodded unsmilingly.

"I know. Something keen and strong and finely tempered."

He marveled that she could have put his thought so exactly into words.

"And he's kind, too," she added. "I don't think I ever knew any one so kind."

"Don't I know it?" Standish said. A shadow crossed his face. "That's just the trouble. If his kindness to us should get him into difficulties—"

That was a thing that had been much in his thoughts lately, the very probable danger that Don Diego was running by having them in his house.

"With the revolutionaries?" Faith considered that. "No, I don't think so," she said. "Nobody seems to have recognized you in Encarnación. Jerry, I mean."

"No, but if they should, you see, Jerry being under indictment—"

He stopped, balking at the word murder.

"Of course he was acting under orders," he said hastily, and then was sorry he had said it. It sounded as if he thought Maxton needed defending.

She raised her brows a trifle.

"I don't think that would matter to Don Diego. He doesn't judge his guests."

"My Lord, I didn't mean that." He flushed unhappily. "It's just the risk he's running. The Lord knows what that crowd in Encarnación would do to get their hands on the man that shot José Ramirez. As for me, I don't know. If I was picked up in company with him—and being connected with the P. A.—"

He stopped again, uncomfortably, remembering that this was a story that nobody believed. It seemed to be a morning of uncomfortable pauses.

"Did he tell you about me?" he demanded.

"About your saying that you were the nephew of the head of the P. A.? Yes, he told me."

It was not that he wanted his story accepted. He had long since stopped worrying about that. But somehow, whatever people in general thought, he knew suddenly that he wanted this grave, clear eyed girl to know that he was telling the truth, wanted it with an intensity that he himself did not entirely understand.

He struggled up on one elbow.

"And about having my papers stolen, and some one impersonating me at the Ciudad Luiz office? You thought I was lying, of course, or crazy."

She met the half sullen, half defiant question in his glance with eyes that were calm and a little surprised.

"Why, no, I didn't think you were lying."

He stared at her eagerly. But he had to be sure.

He said deliberately:

"Wales of the P. A. thought I was lying—and the Ciudad Luiz office, and the consul at Juarez. Even Jerry, and he's

pretty level headed as you know. Faith, if you believe me, you're the only one in Quetzalpan that does. You're not just saying it?"

She made a scornful face.

"Jerry may be level headed, and he is sweet, but he doesn't know everything. As for the rest, what do they know about it? Anybody who runs the P. A. as stupidly as Mr. Wales seems to—well, that's what he would think. Lies come from fear," she added, more thoughtfully. "That's what Don Diego says, and it's true. If you were afraid, you wouldn't have helped me that night in Encarnación. And Don Diego believes it, too."

He settled back on to the pillows again, warmed by her confidence, yet troubled.

"That's all the more reason why we've got to get out of here. If Don Diego is decent enough to believe me, then I certainly can't let him in for trouble on my account."

"But it isn't on your account at all. Jerry's the one they want."

"Jerry's got a claim," he reminded her. "I haven't."

She smiled.

"You don't know Don Diego. Any guest has a claim on him, particularly one who did what you did for me. And any friend of Jerry's has a claim on me," she added swiftly and with a queer little pride. "And anyway, it's out of the question for you to think about leaving now. You won't be strong enough to travel—oh, for days. It's slow getting over fever."

Then, seeing that the thing still troubled him, she said:

"Honestly, I don't believe there's any danger. Everybody in this part of the country knows Don Diego and loves him. I can't imagine anybody harming him."

She spoke so confidently that for the time being she convinced him.

LATER he was not so sure. Standish had seen something of the temper of the revolution. He remembered the shooting of the *jefe* at La Boca and the ferocity of Jiminez and the men of Aguilar was fresh in his mind. This was the East country, too, where the anti-American, anti-P.A. feeling ran highest.

"They're half *indio*," Maxton had said, "and a tough lot. No tellin' what they'll do." He did not like it.

There had been an ugly sound to that mob in the street, too, the night they got to Encarnación. Of course Don Diego had been able to handle them—then. But suppose they had known that the two inside the house were the nephew of the head of the P. A., and the man who killed José Ramirez?

Maxton, when he spoke to him about it, offered small comfort. He threw out his hands in a gesture that said that the thing was beyond him.

"Sure, I know it's dangerous," he agreed, "but what are you goin' to do? You can't move for ten days yet, maybe more. Oh, that's all right about how strong you feel. I know all about that; I've had jungle fever myself. You're just strong enough to get about ten miles and then crack up on me. And then they'd have us both, and *then* how long d'you figure it would take 'em to find out who'd been puttin' us up for the past couple of weeks? Be yourself, Ace."

"But isn't there some place near here where I could lie up for a few days till I got my strength back?" Standish wanted to know. "Just so we could clear Don Diego?"

"If there was," Maxton demanded, "can you see that old gentleman lettin' you leave his house like you are? He'd hold you by force if he thought you was doin' it on his account; that's the kind of a sportsman he is . . . No," he added emphatically. "There's just one way you can do any good, and that's by lyin' still and gettin' well. You better put out on that and quit worryin'."

It was sound enough advice, Standish admitted, but it was far from satisfying. And his attempt to thrash the matter out with Don Diego himself was even less so.

"I felt," he told Faith later, "as though I were talking to somebody out of the Round Table. We couldn't even get down

to the same premises. When I told him I thought he was running a risk, he said, 'God sends the guest', and he seemed to think that settled everything."

"It would," Faith agreed with a little laugh that was half amused and all proud and tender. "It would, for him."

"Well, it didn't for me. I tried to tell him about the danger. All he would say was that he had answered for our not being Lopezista spies, and since we weren't Lopezista spies his honor was clear. So I told him it wasn't his honor I was talking about, but his safety. I told him that if the Revolutionary Committee ever heard he was hiding the man that killed José Ramirez and the nephew of the head of the P. A. they wouldn't stop anywhere short of murder."

"And he said—?" she suggested, her head a little on one side, with a smile that told him she knew what the answer would be.

"He said, 'Señor, your interest in this matter does you credit, but I fear I could hardly allow myself to permit the Revolutionary Committee to dictate my choice of guests.' I gave up after that."

THERE were other times when he pursuaded her to tell him things about herself, little snatches of things told with a shy directness that was almost childlike, and yet with an insight that was mature beyond that of the girls he knew.

He thought perhaps it was the way she had lived, away from everything he had been accustomed to, alone in this up East country with her father and Don Diego.

She had come here when she was eleven years old, he learned, with her father—Sid, she called him adoringly—who had been a doctor for the P. A. He and Don Diego, who seemed to have taken them under his wing from the first, had been almost the only people she had ever known. And then, two years before—she was sixteen then—Sid had died, and she had come, perfectly naturally, to live with Don Diego.

"He's your guardian, isn't he?" He was curious on Maxton's account.

"Not legally, but—yes, I suppose it would be something like that. I've never thought much about it. When Sid died he asked me to come and live with him. He said he wanted me because he was lonely and didn't have any family, but really it's just because he's so kind. The P. A. offered to send me North and give me some sort of a pension, on account of Sid, but somehow, I never quite liked the idea of taking it."

"But good heavens, you certainly had it coming to you."

"Why? The P. A. paid Sid's salary as long as he lived. I hadn't done anything for them. There's no reason why they should have had me on their hands."

She broke off, thoughtfully.

"I suppose you think that sounds absurd," she said, "when Don Diego's been supporting me ever since. But it's different, somehow, when you love somebody, don't you think? Don Diego gives me things, of course, lovely things, everything I want. But they don't matter. I'm not even grateful for them, I suppose. I'd hate to be grateful. Does that sound awful?"

Standish frowned.

"I don't understand it exactly," he confessed. "D'you mean on account of your pride?"

She swept her hand in gesture of disdain.

"Pride! No. Don Diego and I don't have any pride about each other. It's just that when you love somebody, the lovely things they do for you make you feel all warm and happy inside—because they do them, not because of the things themselves. If you were grateful for the *things*, it would spoil everything. It would make it all so cheap. Don't you see what I mean?"

"I think perhaps I do." He was watching the play of light on her hair. He broke off suddenly to ask a question that he had hesitated to ask before. "Look here, don't you ever get—well—lonely up here? I know you're awfully fond of Don Diego,

of course. I should think any one would be. But even if you are going to be married, I should think a girl like you—"

"Lonely?" Her tone was a little puzzled as though she had never considered that before. Then, with a flash of comprehension:

"Oh, you mean, don't I miss the parties, and the clothes and things like that that other girls have? Is that it?"

It was so exactly what he did mean that he was taken aback.

"Why, yes, I guess that is it." And then, lest she should get the idea that he thought she showed the lack of them, he added hastily, "But of course you get away pretty often."

"I've never been away in my life," she interrupted him, her eyes lighting with a sudden tensity. "Anywhere. But I'm going."

"When you're married—"

"Oh, then, of course. But, this is before." Her voice lilted, suddenly joyous. "Don Diego and I are going to Paris!"

"Oh, say, you'll like that." Standish's tone had caught some of her enthusiasm. "When?"

"Well, after Jerry's safe somewhere. Don Diego just told me this morning. And after the revolution's over and everything quiets down."

"I should think this would be the best time, right now—except for Jerry, of course. You wouldn't want to leave him while the fighting's still going on, naturally." In his mind the trip to Ciudad Luiz was as good as accomplished now.

She shook her head with a quick seriousness.

"Oh, no, I couldn't possibly leave while Jerry's in any danger. And Don Diego has to stay here on the *estancia*, too. He has to take care of his people. The *sobrestante's* gone, you see, and even when he's here you've no idea of the responsibility there is in a big place like this. But afterward—oh, afterward it's going to be too wonderful. I'm going to have all new dresses and see the races at Longchamps—everybody goes to Longchamps, Don Diego says—and go to the theater every night. Do you know, I've never been to a theater in my life. And dances—" She stopped short, and said a little wistfully, "You can dance, of course? Oh, everybody can but me. But I could learn, couldn't I?"

He was studying her covertly now, curled in the big chair, looking absurdly like a little girl. He thought of the way she moved, all grace and glad, supple slimness.

He said:

"To dance? I should say you could. I'm not any wonder," he added, "but I'd love to teach you."

"Oh, would you? Really?" Her eyes were shining. Then, a little breathlessly, she asked, "And do you think people will like me, when I get to Paris, I mean? Don Diego says all the young men will fall at my feet, but of course he's absurd. And Jerry. But I do so want to have a *lot* of people to like me, and you see I've never been *any*where—"

She stopped with a quick shyness, and he saw a flush creep from her throat to the roots of her hair.

With a swift glance at her gray eyes he understood. It was not coquetry, as he had thought for an instant; she was asking in all seriousness. Brought up here in the East country, knowing only her father and Don Diego and Maxton, she had never had any standard of comparison for herself. And she was asking, naively, timidly a little, but honestly, whether or not she was attractive.

He caught his breath. There was a frank simplicity about it that was startling. He could not pass this off with a compliment. She was not asking for compliments; she wanted to know.

She eyed him, questioning, fearless. Her blush deepened.

He said gravely—

"If you want to know what I think, Faith, I think a great many men will like you very much."

He stopped, and then, almost as if the words were being pulled out of him without his own volition, he added—

"If I could only tell you how I like you—"

For an instant her eyes were startled.

"Oh!" she said. "Oh, thank you very much."

With a swish of silk she uncoiled herself suddenly from the chair.

"I've got to see about something," she told him a little breathlessly, and was gone.

He lay back in a sort of slow dismay.

"My Lord!" he told himself. "I've *got* to get out of here now before I make a fool of myself."

CHAPTER XIX

PLANS . . .

ON THE fifth day, which was the tenth since he had been brought to the Estancia Espinoza, Standish came downstairs. He found Maxton and Don Diego in the patio. They made much of him, and Maxton got him a chair and lined it with cushions, and he dropped into it gratefully, for he was still very weak.

The sunlight was warm and yellow. The doves made little clicking, cooing noises. A great old hound that lay with its gray muzzle across Don Diego's foot opened a sleepy eye, thumped the flags with its tail, and went to sleep again. From the kitchen wing came laughter and the *clip-clop* of women's hands making *tortillas*. He smelled the spicy tang that the breeze had sometimes brought to his room. He spoke of it, and Don Diego brought him a handful of leaves from a flowering shrub nearby and showed him how to crush them between his palms to get the full aroma.

Maxton was busy, carving out a toy for a fat, brown baby who stood at his elbow and watched with solemn, absorbed eyes.

"It's what they call a devil wheel," he explained. "The *indios* in the mountains make 'em for their kids. You run a stick down this row of teeth, and the little wheel at the end turns. There you are, little good-for-nothing. Run along now, and don't bother me for a whole hour or I'll have that big bear I told you about come and eat you. That's the sixth I've had to make," he added. "The little devils bother the life out of me."

Don Diego chuckled as the little figure capered away in the dusty sunshine.

"He has upset every man, woman and child on the place," he told Standish. "The young girls put flowers in their hair and stand in the doorways, hoping he will come by; in consequence the men spend their time looking at them, and will do no work. And old Josepha, who is fat, and has a disposition straight from hell, besides having buried three husbands, sighs and rolls her eyes and lets the meat burn. As for the children, *por Dios*, they are everywhere you step."

He laughed again, and Standish joined in from sheer content to be up and out again, while Maxton flushed and drawled—

"Aw, don't let him kid you."

Presently a little *criada* brought silver cups of sweet, white wine, and they drank ceremonially, and after that the talk swung around to Morales and the revolution.

"How he ever got into the country at all is what I don't understand," Maxton was saying. "If he is here, and it's not just a rumor."

"I think he is here," Don Diego told them. "There have been rumors before, but not anything like this. The whole country has risen. As to how he got here, who knows? He would seem to be like his father, that one—brilliant, audacious and always unexpected."

"Be sure he was unexpected," Maxton agreed with a certain relish. "Between them, Lopez and the P. A. had the coast closed as tight as a water cask. It took a passport to land at all and a visé to go up-country. They had to know all about a visitor, and he had to show a good reason before he could leave Juarez."

Don Diego nodded soberly.

"A bad business," he said. "Such things are sure breeders of trouble."

"I'd like to know how he did it—got in, I mean," Standish said. "Bribed the

officials, do you suppose? Or forged passports?"

Maxton was doubtful.

"That sort of thing isn't easy to do. The P. A. would be watching for something like that. Still, it's possible. Well, here's to him, however he did it. He's a man."

"You sound as if you were ready to join him," Standish observed, and he grinned ruefully.

"Oh, I'm on the wrong side of the fence this time. But the guard is my regiment. A man has to stand by his regiment," and Don Diego nodded gravely. "The regiment, yes. And yet I could wish—ah, well . . . "

THE FEDERAL army was in the field somewhere between them and Ciudad Luiz, Standish learned presently. There had been some small preliminary skirmishing.

"Meanwhile," Don Diego said with a frown, "the revolution gains strength, organization, training. He knows how to wait, that young Morales—better than his father."

"And the federals allow it?" Standish was surprised. "But I should think the sooner they hit them the better."

Don Diego shrugged his shoulders.

"Doubtless. But who is to lead them? Not Narcisco Lopez certainly."

There was an edged contempt in his tone that was startling, coming from him. Maxton caught the look of wonderment in his friend's eyes and explained in English.

"Lopez did a bunk and got out of Quetzalpan when the trouble broke. We heard a week ago. Well, I told you what he was."

Standish considered that thoughtfully. If Lopez had left, and if the revolution was gathering strength while the federals waited inactive—

"Look here," he demanded suddenly. "Isn't every day we wait going to make it just that much harder to get through to Ciudad Luiz?"

"Oh, you can't tell about that," Maxton soothed him; and then, slipping into Spanish out of courtesy to Don Diego, "You aren't fit to travel yet, you know."

"I feel all right," Standish insisted obstinately, "and I think we ought to be starting."

As he spoke it came over him suddenly how much he hated the idea. But that was all the more reason. For the past twenty-four hours he and Faith had seemed to avoid each other by a sort of tacit understanding, except when there was a third person present. It was a situation that ought to be ended quickly.

"I don't want to go," he added. "But if the delay is going to make it more difficult, and it is—"

Don Diego said quickly:

"What talk is this of leaving? You are weak, hardly able to stand as yet. Later, when your strength has come back, God willing, there will be time enough to speak of it. Although," he added, "I had promised myself the pleasure of your company for a long time to come. We see few friends up this way."

Standish thanked him, and since he had learned that it was useless to plead the risk of having them in the house, he said:

"But I must get to Ciudad Luiz, sir. If some one is impersonating me there, I owe it to my uncle—"

The older man inclined his head.

"Understood," he agreed. "Perhaps you could do no less, when you can travel, of course. But—" he shook his head—"I fear that by the time you reach there, so far as the P. A. is concerned, the mischief will have been done. And Ciudad Luiz is a long road from here and a dangerous road. It would be a pity to have your trouble for nothing."

"CIUDAD LUIZ is the only place in Quetzalpan where we can be safe, I am afraid, sir," Maxton told him.

"Why not here? How long will Ciudad Luiz be safe, do you think? See now—" he leaned forward, tracing on the flags

with the handle of his riding whip—"here is the up East country." He used the English word, which, since the coming of the P. A. had been universal in Quetzalpan. "The up East is revolutionary to a man—mad with it. To the north, the river towns, which have already declared for Morales with the exception of Matzan, and the little federal garrison there will shortly be wiped out. South the desert and the mountains."

"And right here in the middle, the guard," Maxton interrupted him. "Oh, I know it isn't what it was in your time, Don Diego, but whether Lopez stays or not, the guard is paid to stay, and it will stay."

The older man looked grave.

"About the guard there is no doubt," he agreed. "It will stay. But for what? Outnumbered twenty to one, the revolution on every side."

"They will make a very pretty fight for all that," Maxton insisted. "Professional soldiers, gunmen. I know all about that. But it's their business to fight, and they'll fight."

"I too know the guard," Don Diego reminded him. "Yes, the guard will fight—savagely." He shook his head unhappily. "And I could wish there were no such regiment."

Maxton stared.

"But you are no revolutionary, Don Diego. Do you want to see Morales walk into Ciudad Luiz unhindered?"

Don Diego's eyes were thoughtful.

"I want peace for Quetzalpan," he said simply.

"I have seen presidents come and go," he went on after a moment. "Some have been good presidents, and some have been bad, and all have been better than a war. See now, here is this Morales—good or bad, I do not know, but certain, I think, to win. Now if there were no guard—and I am speaking of my own regiment, remember—he might walk into Ciudad Luiz tomorrow, make himself president, and these foolish people would go back to their homes and their lives would be as before. But what happens? The guard fights, as we know it will fight, and in the end Morales takes the town with heavy losses. And he finds there what remains of the guard."

"They can retreat to the seacoast along the San Jacinto road," Maxton pointed out.

"*Pues*, a regiment can cut the San Jacinto road. No, Morales takes the town, fighting every inch of the way. And what then? Then the victors must have their revenge, the executions, the reprisals, more bloodshed, more bitterness, and in the end, sometime, another revolution and all to do again."

Maxton said:

"Well, the guard will have to fight. That's what they're there for, and that's what they'll have to do," and the older man sighed.

"Yes, you would feel so," he agreed wearily. "I myself was young once, and in love, and rode with the guard."

He was silent a moment, his fine face troubled. Then:

"Señors, there was once a time when my head was full of such words as glory and honor and pride—the sort that must be upheld by bloodshed. Now I am older and I know better words. Peace and happiness and tolerance. And I tell you, I who have been a soldier for the best years of my life, and they were good years, that all the honor and glory in the world is not worth the tears of one woman weeping in the night, or one little child, homeless and hungry."

No one spoke for a moment. Then Standish said—

"It sounds as though you were right, sir."

"Of course he's right," Maxton came in surprisingly. "Absolutely right. War is the stupidest, nastiest thing in the world. But—" he shrugged his shoulders—"if they're goin' to fight . . ."

Don Diego sighed and leaned over to scratch the hound's ears.

"Yes," he agreed when he had straightened again, "they will fight. I was like that myself when I was younger. I thought that a fight could settle things.

Now I know that they must settle themselves, and that there is nothing to do but wait, patiently." He paused a moment, his eyes thoughtful and far away, and then repeated, "Patiently."

CHAPTER XX

DANCE OF DESTINY

AS MAXTON had predicted, the revolution was tuning up. Out at the *estancia*, with its cool, shaded patio, and gracious rooms, they seemed very far away from the stories that rumor brought them from Encarnación. But although life went on in its timeless, ordered way, there was a growing undercurrent of tenseness.

Standish felt it strongly. He chafed at the delay, and as the clogging weakness began to leave him he was obsessed with a nervous restlessness that ached to get started.

One of the many ironies of the situation was Maxton's counseling patience.

"This trip ain't goin' to be any picnic," he pointed out. "If you don't know that by this time you ought to. And when you've had a mess of jungle fever there's only one thing to do, and that's keep quiet. You ask Red, if you don't believe me; her father was a doctor and she ought to know."

One of the last things Standish wanted to do was to ask Faith anything. Just at present what he wanted to do was to get away, to put her out of his sight and out of his mind entirely. Maxton's blind confidence exasperated him.

"Well, I'm no baby," he snapped. "We've got to get out of here, that's all. If you're willing to run the risk, I'm not."

Maxton's mouth hardened.

"Looka here, you seem to think that all we're stayin' for is my amusement. Let me tell you something: You went cuckoo on me once and it turned out all right, but I don't aim to have you doin' it again. It might not work out so well." He looked him over critically. "It'll be a week at least," was his verdict, "and maybe ten days. You don't look like much now if you ask me."

Standish had to be content with that.

EVERY day, and sometimes two and three times a day, bands of revolutionary soldiers rode past, disorganized, undisciplined and usually drunk. For the most part they confined themselves to stealing a few sheep from the outlying corrals and terrifying such of the peons as were still at work on the *estancia*, but one morning a gang, bolder than the others, rode up to the house and demanded money.

Don Diego, in spite of Faith's protests and Maxton's counsel, went out alone, unarmed, and succeeded in sending them about their business, but not before there had been a good deal of shouting and flourishing of rifles on the part of the revolutionaries, and a remarkable display of tact and firmness on his.

He made little of it when he came into the house again, but Maxton was inclined to take it more seriously.

"Things are gettin' rough," was his comment. To Standish he said later, "I tell you what's a fact, Ace. I don't like the way this business is shapin' up. Everybody in this part of the country knows Don Diego. If they're not goin' to lay off him this early you can't tell what they might do when they're steamed up a little more. I wish there was some way of gettin' Red out of here."

Standish felt a quick chill of alarm.

"You don't suppose there's any danger out here? To them, I mean."

Maxton shook his head.

"Not right now, anyhow," he said, but his face was more serious than Standish had seen it in many a day.

"Trouble is," he went on a moment later, "that in a time like this you don't know what's goin' to happen. If it was anywheres but here . . . But these up East folks are a rough lot. They're half *indio*, just dumb enough to be dangerous, and when they start there's no tellin' where they're goin' to finish. No, I'd like it a

heap better if Red was out of Quetzalpan, this part of it anyhow."

"You don't think—?" Standish was beginning apprehensively, when the other cut him short.

"I don't know what to think," he said briefly, "but I don't like it."

One after another the men on the *estancia* disappeared to join the revolution, leaving their women to fend for themselves, and these began to crowd around the *hacienda*, helpless and bewildered. Their men had gone, they did not know where, and since they were unable to read or write, there was no way of hearing from them or knowing what was happening. There was no food in their little cabins, and no money to buy any, even if they had dared to go to town to get it.

Terrified by the roving bands of soldiers, their world falling to pieces around them, they clung to the one stable thing they knew, the one thing that had never failed them. They camped in Don Diego's patio, some dull and frightened and stolid, some with shrill lamenting, until Faith took charge of them. She found them sleeping quarters in the sheds and outbuildings, calmed their hysteria, and fed the children.

ON THE sixth day after Standish had come downstairs, word came to the *estancia* that Don Diego's town house had been looted.

It was Ramón, the old coachman, who brought the news. He had ridden into Encarnación in the morning on an errand for Don Diego. He came back a little after noon, on foot, cut and bruised about the head and shoulders, with a story of an armed band which had met him just out of town. They had taken the horse and the little money that Don Diego had entrusted to him to buy supplies, and it was this same band who boasted of the looting of Don Diego's house. One of them, with triumphant malice, had shown him a pair of silver mounted pistols by way of proof.

"*Sí*, Excellency, the very same pistols that lay in the beautiful red box in the hall. No, Excellency, I could not be mistaken."

The man went off to the kitchen to have his hurts attended to, and Don Diego shrugged his shoulders.

"After all, that was to be expected," he said philosophically. "They are like children with a new toy. They have a revolution, and they must see how it works. But I am distressed for Ramón."

Faith was outraged.

"But all your beautiful things! And to you. Why it's unbelievable!"

"God has been good, my child," he told her. "I have other things, many more than I need."

"But who would do a thing like that? Why everybody knows that he could have your last penny if he came to the door needing it."

He smiled.

"Let's hope it won't come to that," he told her lightly, but Standish noticed that when he looked at Faith a moment later his eyes were troubled.

That alone would have been enough to worry him, and what Maxton said later did nothing to reassure him.

"I don't like the looks of this thing," he told him abruptly. "You're right. We've got to get out of here."

They were sitting in a corner of the patio. Standish glanced around swiftly and lowered his voice.

"You mean this business this morning? You don't think they've got some personal spite against Don Diego?"

"I wouldn't go so far as that. But looka here, we've been goin' on the idea that the old gentleman's reputation would protect him. Well, those fellas knew whose house they were lootin'. They said so. And they knew whose *cochero* they were beatin' up. I don't like the looks of that a-tall."

Suddenly and terribly the apprehension that had lain for days in Standish's mind crystallized into fear. He said:

"But say—they—why a man like Don Diego can't have any enemies. Nobody

could have anything against him; that's nonsense." He wanted desperately to be reassured.

But Maxton was not reassuring.

"Any rich man has enemies," he said impatiently. "And Don Diego is far and away the richest in these parts. And what's more, he hasn't come out for the revolution."

"But he isn't supporting Lopez. He thinks he's the scum of the earth."

Maxton shook his head and his frown deepened.

"Ace, you don't know how folks can be in war time. I saw it in '17, when everybody that didn't bust 'emselves wide open buyin' Liberty Bonds was a German spy. Didn't you ever hear the ruckus about them spreadin' poison candy around for children? Well plenty folks actually believed that stuff. Some of 'em do yet. And that's in what's s'posed to be an intelligent country. You can figure it out for yourself what they're liable to do in a place like this. I wish to God he'd get out of here and take Red with him."

Somehow the actual mention of Faith brought the thing home to Standish with numbing force. He said helplessly:

"Well, he won't. I've talked about that to him. He insists there isn't any danger, and he says he's got to stay here and take care of his people."

"He would." Maxton snapped the ash off his cigaret. "Oh, damn his people! Nine chances out of ten there was some of his own hands mixed up in that lootin'. I'm not worried about him so much, but Red—"

Standish said desperately:

"Look here. You marry her—*now!* And we'll take her with us."

He was not thinking about the conventions as he spoke. It was a frantic, spur-of-the-moment idea. Standish was still young enough so that in some intangible way the transformation of Faith into a "married woman" seemed to settle his own problem concerning her.

Maxton was staring at him.

"Have you gone cuckoo again? D'you think I'd get her into marryin' me like that? And is it your idea that this is any trip for a girl the way we're goin'? It's a fifty-fifty shot whether we get through at all—prob'ly not that good. And you want to turn it into a honeymoon. Judas Priest, fella, what d'you think would happen to her if they caught her with us?"

"I—well, I guess you're right," Standish said slowly. It was a letdown and at the same time a relief not to have his suggestion taken up. At the same time, it left him where he was before with regard to Faith's safety.

"I hate the idea of leaving them," he added, "but I suppose they're really safer here, as soon as we get away, of course."

"And that's goin' to be as soon as we can get started. Next thing you know they'll be comin' out here to the *estancia.*"

"Oh my Lord! You think so?"

"Bound to. And you can figure out just about how much us bein' here would help 'em. I don't like to leave 'em any more than you do, but nine chances out of ten when they do come they won't have any idea except to run the horses off and get what money there is. But we can't let 'em find us here. How you feelin', fit to ride?"

"I'm all right; don't bother about that. When shall we go?"

"Well, let's see." Maxton squinted at the sun, low over the white wall. "It's around 6:30, late to get things in shape for tonight. We've got to make a long jump, this first one. And we'll want food. I'll get Josepha to cook us up a mess of *frijoles.* Say sundown tomorrow. Suit you? Good enough. I reckon it's safe for another day. If they was fixin' to do anything right away they'd have done it by now."

LATER that evening Standish sat with Faith on the low parapet of the roof over the living wing of the *hacienda.* He had decided that since they were going tomorrow he might decently allow himself this little time alone with her, enough to give him a memory to carry away with him. He had tried sincerely to give Maxton the chance on this last evening. But

Maxton had somehow become involved in a discussion of tactics with Don Diego, and now the two were sitting in the patio below, under the great, iron lamp, with a bottle of wine between them. He could see the lamplight, yellow on Don Diego's hair, and from time to time he caught the murmur of their voices, or a laugh.

Somehow the thought of Maxton wasting this last evening down there when he could be up here exasperated him. And what was the fool thinking of to be so utterly careless? Did he think no one could see Faith except himself? And it was this very careless confidence that tied his own hands so completely.

She sat beside him, misty in white, and the little, fitful breeze that brought the tang of the flowering shrub up to them ruffled her gossamer scarf. Once it brushed his cheek.

Somewhere out in the darkness some one was strumming a guitar, idly, and the notes made little, tinkling balls of sound that hung for an instant like silver bubbles before they vanished.

"That's Manuel's wife," Faith said. "Perhaps she'll play 'Rio d'Oro'."

She hummed it lightly. Neither spoke for a moment. He was watching the curve of her throat.

He broke the silence with an effort.

"I can't tell you how happy it's been here—how I'll hate to leave tomorrow." He tried to make his tone conversational, to throw off the spell that her physical nearness was winding about him.

"Don't let's think about that." Her voice came dreamily out of the darkness. "Listen, there it is. 'Rio d'Oro'."

The guitar had drifted into a queer, plaintive little melody that fitted the time and his mood. He said:

"I won't see you again for a long time, I suppose. Not until you come back from Paris."

She touched his arm with a little cry.

"Oh, you were going to teach me to dance. Don't you remember?"

He was sitting with his forearms on his knees and his shoulders bowed forward. In justice to him, he made an effort. He said nothing, staring out into the starlit dark, but his arm tightened under her hand.

She slid her foot once or twice on the tiling of the roof.

"It's smooth," she suggested.

"There's no music."

"No, except 'Rio d'Oro'. I don't suppose we could dance to that?"

He got to his feet, slowly. He slid his arm around her until she lay warm against him. There was a queer wonder in him at her firm slenderness. He had a feeling that if he were to tighten his arm he could crush her.

He heard himself saying—

"You just walk in time to the music." The words seemed as strange and meaningless as a sentence in an unknown language; he had never dreamed she was so little and light.

"Yes?" she said, questioningly, and he became conscious that he had stopped something he was saying right in the middle.

Her hair brushed his ear. He said suddenly—

"And the next time I see you, you'll be married—to Jerry."

Her voice came to him, dreamy, hardly more than a murmur close to his ear.

"I—perhaps. I don't know."

It was the tone rather than the words that made him stiffen.

"Oh, I didn't mean it," she cried. "I didn't!"

He drew a long breath and let his arms drop to his sides.

"I didn't hear you. I—I was listening to the music. It doesn't seem to be—well, the kind you could dance to."

"No, no, I don't believe it is," she told him breathlessly. "I think, please, if you don't mind, I'll go in now."

CHAPTER XXI

WAR

"A FUNNY thing has happened." Faith had come into the big, high ceilinged dining room where Maxton and Standish were already waiting for breakfast. She looked white and

tired, and there was a troubled look in her eyes, but her tone was steadily cheerful.

Maxton pulled out a chair for her.

"What's funny?" he asked.

Instead of sitting down, she remained standing by the door.

"Why all the servants seem to have left. I can't find anybody, not even old Josepha."

It seemed to Standish that he must say something, something light and inconsequential.

"I shouldn't say that was funny," was the best he could do on the spur of the moment. "Where I come from it's considered tragic."

"What's the idea?" Maxton wanted to know. "Doesn't anybody know anything about it?"

"I can't find anybody," she told them again, a little impatiently. "Even the women, the ones that have come in the last few days, have gone too. I can't understand it."

"It looks," Maxton remarked with mock ruefulness, "as if we'd have to rustle our own *frijoles* this mornin'. Well, let's go and have a look anyhow."

They went out together to the kitchen. The embers of last night's fire were still glowing in the big fireplace and a batch of dough, set to rise, stood covered with a cloth on the hearth. But, although it was past the usual breakfast time, there was no sign of a living soul.

The servants' quarters were empty. Odds and ends of cast-off clothing on the floor, and a general look of hasty flight. In one of the little cubicles they found a guitar, lying on a cot where its owner had left it, and Faith said:

"That belongs to Manuel's wife. Why only last night—"

She stopped suddenly, and Standish looked at her with a queer catch in his breath. She avoided his eyes.

"They haven't gone far then," Maxton was saying. "She wouldn't have left that."

Other discoveries seemed to bear him out. There were clothes in some of the chests, and in Josepha's room they found a rosary and a faded plush box with the catch broken, full of the sort of cheap photographs that the low caste Latin American delights to have taken when he draws his pay and goes to town.

"All men," Faith commented. "What an interesting lot of things Josepha must have to tell the *padre*."

They joked about it, but their voices sounded curiously hollow in the empty silence of the rooms.

"I don't think it's any special saint's day," Faith said a moment later, a little crease between her eyes. "And even if it was, they wouldn't all go off without saying something. Not like this."

"Oh well." Maxton caught at the idea comfortingly. "It's prob'ly some *fiesta* or another. And with this revolutionary spirit goin' the rounds, they just didn't bother to tell anybody. They'll all be back for supper most likely."

"They'll hear something from me," Faith promised. "Josepha! The idea! But of course Don Diego will find some excuse for them and ruin the moral effect of anything I say."

They had come back to the kitchen by this time. Maxton had an idea.

"Looka here, how about Ramón? Didn't he sleep in the house last night?"

"Why, yes, he did. I thought he'd rest more comfortably in a real bed. Would you mind seeing, Jerry?"

"I'll go," Standish volunteered quickly in a sort of panic at the idea of their being left alone together.

Something in the way Faith had spoken of last night a few minutes ago had told him that she knew what was in his mind.

"Let me."

He found the old man and led him back, very sleepy, walking stiffly on account of his hurts.

"He doesn't know a thing," he told them. "Says he went to sleep early and didn't hear a sound."

Ramón was quite bewildered and rather of the impression that he was being held responsible for the exodus.

He was a poor man and knew nothing. He had gone to sleep last night in the

beautiful bed as their Excellencies had ordered. He had slept soundly, due to the elegance and comfort of that bed, until just now when he was called. If the servants were gone, it was because of their innate wickedness, of which he, Ramón, was well aware. Ah, he could tell them things! And that Don Diego, who was like the rising sun, and who was second only to the blessed Saint Ignacio himself, as all the world knew—that Don Diego should be left without his breakfast was unthinkable. Undoubtedly the whole thing was the doing of that devil of a Josepha, who was the descendant of seven generations of she-cats and, as everybody knew, had poisoned her last husband.

BREAKFAST was a helter-skelter meal, cooked by all of them together. Don Diego was calm over the defection of his servants. He agreed with Maxton that they would probably come home before night, and, as Faith had prophesied, made excuses for them.

No one spoke of the fact that the two were going to leave that evening. It was as if there were a tacit agreement among them to keep off that subject. Instead, they laughed and joked over each other's attempts at housekeeping with a vivacity that Standish at least found a little forced.

He himself was conscious of a restless sense of strain. That moment last night when he had had Faith in his arms had shown him how things stood with him beyond the shadow of a doubt. He wanted her, more than he had ever wanted anything in his life, and she belonged to his friend.

"You fool," he told himself, "is that what you're getting all excited about? You think you caught something in her tone, do you? Marvelous! You make me *sick!*" And then, a moment later, "But there *was* something—and something about the way she felt against my arm." He asked himself,

"Look here, are you a decent white man, or aren't you? The man's in danger, fighting for his life. And a girl like that—do you suppose she'd throw him over now, when he's in trouble? And what do you think she'd think of you if you took this time to try to cut in on him? Even if she cared about you, which you've no reason to think she does. Put it out of your head, you worm—for now anyway."

That was the solution, he decided. Maxton had refused to take advantage of the situation to marry her. He could be at least as decent as that. Then, when Maxton was safe . . . His mind leaped magnificently over the difficulties of getting to Ciudad Luiz, he would go to him and tell him frankly how matters stood. He could visualize himself doing it.

"May the best man win."

That was the only thing to do, of course, the only thing he could do decently. But instead of feeling strong in the consciousness of virtue, as of course he ought to feel, he found himself still weighed down by a vague depression that he could not throw off.

He laid it to the fact that he was leaving the *estancia* and Faith; but that did not explain the sense of impending evil that hung over him like a cloud. He thought perhaps it was the emptiness of the house, now that the swarming life that filled the back of it was gone. Undoubtedly that did have something to do with it, but it was far from accounting for the queer tensity that he felt as he moved about, getting ready for the start. The more he thought it over, the more it seemed to him that those empty rooms back of the kitchen, with their litter of pitiful belongings, had betokened not a day's truancy for some *fiesta*, but a hasty, terrified flight.

He said something of the sort to Maxton who came in as he was packing the saddlebags Don Diego had furnished.

Maxton dropped to a bench and crossed his knees.

"I don't know," he told him thoughtfully. "You never can tell just why these birds do things. I've seen a whole town stampeded because some fella was sup-

posed to have the evil eye. His eyes looked just the same to me as anybody else's. And these folks up here are half *indio* like I told you. Got all kinds of funny ideas."

He took out a cigaret and lighted it, crossed his knees the other way, and leaned back against the wall.

Presently he said:

"Looka here, Ace. I've been figurin' this thing out."

"Huh?" Standish looked up from his packing.

"This trip," he explained with a wave of his cigaret. "Looka here—it's me they're after. There ain't a one of 'em knows anything about you, or gives a damn most likely. I don't know how come me not to think about it before. Now—" he leaned forward—" the thing for you to do is to stay right here, where you're fairly safe anyhow, and let me do the travelin'."

Standish caught his breath. Did the man have no sense at all? Could he not see what was going on under his own nose?

"You're crazy," he said. "Think I'd do a trick like that—let you go off alone?" And then, because he could not give the real reason, he caught at the first that came to hand. "You remember what we agreed that day at La Boca. I had my choice of leaving you then, and I chose to stick. Well, I still choose to."

Maxton gestured with his cigaret.

"Oh, that was a lot of bellywash. Things have changed since then. Now here you are where it's comfortable and fairly safe, a heap safer than with me anyhow. And Don Diego and Red would be tickled to death to have you. You'd be here to help 'em, too, if they was to need it. Now what's the sense of kickin' the whole wagon to pieces on account of somethin' you said at La Boca two weeks ago when things were different?"

It was the reference to helping them that gave Standish the argument that he wanted.

He laughed shortly.

"Having them find an unexplainable American here would do Don Diego a lot of good, wouldn't it, even if he wasn't the man that shot José Ramirez. No, it's decent of you, Jerry, and all that, but it won't do. Besides, I've got to get to Ciudad Luiz."

Maxton brushed that last aside as inconsequential.

"Now listen here, fella. Use your head. I'll admit the pleasure of my company is somethin' to shout about, but is it worth gettin' your neck broke for? I ask you."

Since the resolution he had taken in regard to Faith, Standish's mood was heroic. And he was not going to do anything to lower it.

"I said I was going to stick with you," he maintained doggedly, "and I am. What sort of a figure would I cut if I stayed here and let you go on?"

"You'd cut a damn' sensible one."

Standish said shortly—

"I'm not sensible that way, thank heaven." He turned back to his packing. "Here, show me how to roll this thing, will you?"

"Then you won't stay?"

"And let you run all the risk alone? Of course I won't. It's mighty decent of you, Jerry, but you know better than that."

MAXTON puffed on his cigaret for a moment without saying anything. Then, deliberately, he got up, stretched, yawned and flicked the butt through a window. He came around to face Standish, who was bending over his packing.

"Fella," he said, "if you ain't the most romantic fool—but, gee, I'm glad you're comin'.

"You know," he went on after a moment, "I wish I could feel the way you do about things—honor and all that. Now you got some jug headed notion that's draggin' you out on this *paseo* and it don't make a bit of sense, but you'll stick to it if it kills you. Which it might very well do. Red's like that, and Don Diego, but me— What the hell! It don't mean any more to me than cat howlin'."

Standish said:

"Oh, shut up, you fool. What are you

trying to persuade me to stay safe and let you run all the risk for if you haven't any understanding of honor?"

"Well, but that ain't honor. That's plain horse sense, Ace."

"All right, what about your being so crazy to get back to your regiment? It's almost sure to be a losing fight, Don Diego says."

"Well, I'm not so sure about that either. But the regiment—well, a fella's got to stick by his regiment. Besides, I'm a professional soldier, in the fightin' business. I can't go back on a contract just because it don't look so good. If I got the reputation for doin' that, where would I get another job?"

He shook his head, wistfully.

"No, I just can't see it. And it makes it awful hard to explain things to Red. You know I haven't told her yet about stickin' up those cars? I know I've got to, but it just don't seem like I could make up my mind to do it. It ain't that I'm ashamed of it exactly, either. I was just gettin' mine, like everybody else. What you think she'll say when I do tell her, anyhow. You've had a chance to look her over."

Standish kept his eyes on his packing.

"My Lord! How do I know, Jerry? I wish you'd show me how to roll this thing."

Maxton had been looking at him questioningly. Now he shrugged.

"All right. Say, while I think of it, we need matches. I'll roll this thing if you'll go down and ask Red for some. Get a good big handful. And we'll have to have some kind of a fryin' pan, too."

It was on the tip of Standish's tongue to say, "Why don't you go?" But if he did, Maxton might ask him why, and just now he was supersensitive to anything that might betray his secret.

"All right. I'll be back in a second," he said, and went in search of Faith.

HE FOUND her in the storeroom among the barrels of flour and sugar and meal. She looked up at him inquiringly.

"Jerry wanted to know if we could have some matches," he said, "and a frying pan, if it isn't inconvenient." Somehow it was hard even to say something like that to her and make it casual and impersonal.

She said:

"Of course. I'll get them for you."

But she made no move to go, and for a long moment the two looked at each other, he uneasy and puzzled, and she a little flushed and hesitant.

"I—I'm sorry about last night," she told him. "I didn't mean—I'm afraid I sounded rude."

"Why, no—that is, I didn't think—"

"And I was afraid you might have misunderstood," she went on swiftly. "About Jerry, I mean. I was tired, I guess, and worried. Of course we're going to be married—soon—just as soon as we can. Perhaps I won't go to Paris after all, and then he and I could go later."

He said steadily:

"Of course. I understood that, Faith."

"I'm glad, I was afraid afterwards that perhaps you thought—and Jerry's so sweet—"

"He's fine, Faith, just as fine as anybody could want, and I know you're going to be very happy. And don't you worry about him. Everything will come out all right."

She said:

"Oh! Thank you. I know it will." She hesitated and then said, "What was it you wanted? Oh, I know. Matches and a frying pan. I'll get them right away."

She moved toward the door. There was a quick rattle and stamp outside in the patio. Voices. A curt order and the thump of rifle butts on the flagging.

They stared at each other. He saw her go white as though the vitality had drained suddenly out of her. She flew to the window; he followed, drew the curtain aside an inch and peered out.

There were five men in the patio, four revolutionary soldiers and an officer. The soldiers lounged at ease, stolid and uninterested, while their officer, a trim youngster with waxed mustaches and white riding breeches cut with a flare, stepped across and knocked on the door

of the living wing with the handle of his crop.

Faith was breathing in slow, shuddering gasps, and he could feel the tremor of her body against his.

"It's all right. It's all *right*, I tell you," he whispered. "They've come for money or horses." He knew while he was saying it that he did not believe it.

The officer knocked again. Faith was saying, dully:

"That's Juan Ferrara from Encarnación. He doesn't want money." A cold grip seemed to fasten on his heart. He took a half step toward the storeroom door, hardly knowing what he meant to do. She dragged at him with both hands.

"No! *No!*"

He stopped, for the door of the living wing was opening.

Don Diego appeared on the threshold. They saw him bow to the young officer.

"You are welcome, Don Juan." His eyes took in the escort without a flicker. "Will you come in?"

The words came clearly to the two in the storeroom. Standish's shoulders stiffened, then relaxed helplessly. Anything he could do would only make matters worse.

HE SAW the younger man bow and hesitate. He did not seem to care for his errand.

"It grieves me not to be able to accept your hospitality, Don Diego, but I have come on duty. I wish it were otherwise."

He pulled a paper from his tunic.

"I have here a warrant for the arrest of one Jerry Maxton, late of the president's guard of the Lopezista government. He is accused of the murder of Don José Ramirez in Encarnación last May."

Faith gave a little, low moan. Standish drew in his breath sharply. Don Diego looked politely inquiring.

"And does this concern me, Don Juan?"

The officer bowed again.

"It does, sir, in that I have information to the effect that this man is hiding—" he changed that swiftly—"is a guest in your house. His identity is, of course, unknown to you, Don Diego," he added.

"Yes, Don Juan?" A tone of polite interest.

The other dropped his official manner.

"Don Diego," he said earnestly, "you must know how I dislike this errand. You can make it easier for me, for yourself, by giving this man up if he is here. If he is not, you have only to say so. I know of no one in Quetzalpan who would question your word."

He bowed again. Don Diego returned it gravely. To the two in the storeroom their stiff courtesy was like a play of marionettes.

"I thank you, Don Juan," the old gentleman told him evenly, "and I understand that you are discharging a disagreeable duty. But I do not feel called upon to answer your question."

"I have authority to insist on an answer, sir."

"Your pardon, but I do not recognize any one's authority to force me to answer questions as to the guests in my house."

The officer bit his lip. He tapped with his crop on the calf of his polished riding boot. Then:

"I beg you will reconsider, sir. I should be sorry to be forced to the necessity of searching your house."

"I should be sorry to see you try."

Up to now, Don Diego's tone had been suave, gravely courteous, but this time the listeners caught a flash of steel in it. So, evidently, did the young officer, for he hesitated before reaching into his tunic and pulling out another paper.

"I have here an authority to search the house and premises, sir, signed by the Revolutionary Committee of Encarnación. I beg that you will not force me to use it."

He held it out as he spoke. Standish saw Don Diego give it a single glance.

"I do not recognize such authority on the part of the Revolutionary Committee, Don Juan," he said levelly.

For an instant their glances met, like

the clash of swords. The officer shrugged his shoulders.

"I regret this exceedingly," he said.

He turned to his men and snapped an order.

Even Standish, watching, did not see where the pistol came from. It simply appeared in the older man's hand. The officer became rigid and the men stood as if frozen, their rifles at varying angles.

Faith drew a quick breath, and Standish whispered—

"Quiet!"

He was watching Don Diego's face, and it was not the face he knew, grave, with a happy kindliness, but a different one, hard, steely eyed, dangerous—the face of a fighting man.

But his tone, when he spoke, was as smooth and courteous as ever.

"I am sorry, Don Juan, to draw a pistol against a friend who comes to my door; but this matter touches the honor of my house. I must ask you to leave it with your men. I hope you will pardon my discourtesy, and that I may have the pleasure of seeing you again under happier circumstances."

The men stared at the pistol anxiously. For a moment the young officer seemed of two minds whether to rush the door. Then he shrugged his shoulders and threw out his hands.

"You are making a mistake, Don Diego," he told him. "We shall get the man. I have twenty men surrounding the house at this moment—and you, I fear, will find yourself in difficulties with the Revolutionary Committee. However, it is what I had expected. It is war then?"

"It is war, Don Juan. I am sorry."

"No more than I, sir."

He gave an order. The men shouldered their rifles, wheeled, and marched out of the gate. As he prepared to follow he turned and saluted stiffly.

Don Diego bowed, still holding the pistol steady.

"To a better meeting," he called after him. "*Con dios*, Don Juan."

TO BE CONTINUED

RANGER WAYS

By EUGENE CUNNINGHAM

A STANDING joke in Texas is that the rangers are weak on geography and that, the farther south they travel, the sketchier becomes their knowledge of, say, international boundaries. This most ancient of tales, having many exemplifications of record, seems particularly verified by the ride of Sergeant Jim Gillett, "A" Company, Frontier Battalion, stationed at Ysleta, Texas, in April of '81.

In Socorro, New Mexico, A. M. Conklin, editor of the *Socorro Sun*, was murdered as he came out of church by the brothers Abram and Enofrio Baca. The rangers kept specially sharp lookout. There was a thousand dollars reward offered and, besides, in Ysleta lived an uncle of the brothers—Judge José Baca, of the El Paso County bench.

Jim Gillett captured Abram Baca on the judge's veranda. Some time later he learned that Enofrio was clerking in the general store at Saragoza, Mexico, four miles across the river from Ysleta. Gillett knew Captain Baylor too well to even mention this fact. He knew, also, that the Mexican authorities would never surrender a Mexican murderer to the rangers. Geography seeming his only hope, he and Private George Lloyd went down to the Rio Grande.

"George," said Gillett pensively, "where's this Texas-Mexico line, anyhow?"

"The line?" grunted Lloyd, amazedly. "Why—why, the river here!"

"Enofrio Baca's clerking in Saragoza . . . I've been wondering about this international boundary business . . . Thought maybe you could help me out . . ."

"Well, sir—" George's Stetson came down over his eyes while he scratched his head—"'s funny how things slip you! But, seems to me I've heard tell that the boundary's right down in this neighborhood—somewheres. It's the Rio Something or Other. Look yonder, Sarge! Other side that church! Ain't that a shine like water? Why, maybe *that's* the boundary river folks tell about!"

"George," replied Gillett thoughtfully, "you *might* be right!"

So they jogged down the main road toward Saragoza, being very careful not to cross the river—the one George had thought he saw beyond Saragoza parish church. They turned into the *bosques* and skirted the village, then rode in from the west. George held the horses while Gillett went into the store. There was red headed Enofrio Baca, measuring calico for an old woman. He looked up.

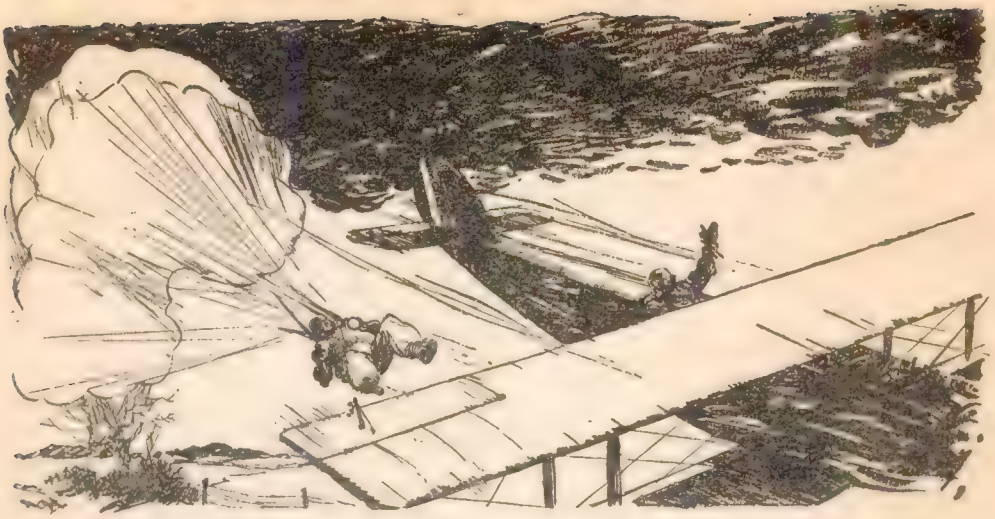
"*Botella de tequila!*" cried Enofrio earnestly, at sight of the lean, grim, Colt bearing figure in the door. "She are those unblessed ranger!"

"Now, listen," invited Gillett, "if you were to get killed, you couldn't go back to Paso del Norte with me. Well!"

Meekly Enofrio climbed up behind George. In the store the old woman fainted with a necklace of *chilis* about her throat and the bolt of calico clasped to her ample bosom. Two men of girth discussed precedence at the rear door. In the street the population of Saragoza—friends of Baca or merely enemies of the rangers—leaped upon its horses while the church bell *clanged-clanged!* Hell-for-leather, then, raced the rangers. Three miles to the river with bullets kicking up Mexican sand about the horses' hoofs. Across. Gillett bowed formally.

"Enofrio Baca!" Indignantly he addressed the dazed passenger—

"I arrest you for the murder of A. M. Conklin, a respected citizen of Socorro!"



BORROWED TIME

A Story of a Low Flying Major of the Air Service

By ANDREW A. CAFFREY

IN THE commanding officer's office at Beulah Field headquarters, right over the bust of Napoleon, you'll find this line from Confucius: "Falling hurts least those who fly low."

That, any airman will tell you, is bunk. Flying low, the same airman will add, is the thing that kills.

Well, at one time, we would say so too. Say that Confucius had no right to butt into air, and even suggest that he lose his seat as tutelary saint to majors and colonels. They're the ones who habitually fly low, the ones who put their coin on the things that Confucius wrote. But much water and many aviators have gone by the fall since the ancient Chinese made that mistake; and in so far as this yarn is one of aviators and water, let's lay off the C. O.'s motto till we watch him work for a while.

Major Kegg was the most blessed, low flying highranker that ever went unkilled at Beulah Field. He has been on borrowed time so long that he takes the extension for granted. And nothing—in a flying life—can be worse than that.

This Major Kegg is the Kegg who was known around Washington, before the war, as Battles Kegg; he was always fighting everybody and everything. And More was added when he came back from France with enough medals to sink a ship; this in spite of the fact that he had never been out of the S. O. S. More Battles Kegg is the name that makes him maddest.

More Battles had never made any records for friends won. He just did not have 'em. But his old man, General Down With Liquor Kegg, an ancient militarist, had always taken care of his offspring and hoped for the best. It was a hopeless hope because, while in medical superstition the seventh son of a seventh

son is supposed to be a born doctor, in the Army, the son of a general is only another soldier. And if he is not too bad, thank the Lord.

More Battles Kegg inherited the Beulah Field command just because they have got to have some member of the royal family in the position of top man wherever the flag floats above rundown company streets and ramshackle barracks. And Beulah was all that and much worse.

More Battles, in the first place, had taken to air because other young bloods of the royal brood were doing so; the money, too, was a little better than in the old branches.

Being a flying officer, and in command, Major More Battles must do just so much aviating each month. Too, to get flying credit, an Air Corps officer must take care not to pad his pay voucher. To the lasting honor of high rankers, let it be written here that they don't cheat—much. And unless they're known as good fellows, and are kind to the under officers, they do their own flying and do not cheat at all. More Battles, because he was nasty, had to do his own aviating—and was watched. One slip of the pen on his part, and all the flying lieutenants at Beulah would have climbed the paymaster's frame for a public accounting. So, at all times, More Battles flew low and slow, trusted in Confucius, and gathered unto himself more and more borrowed time. Borrowed time is the time upon which impossible pilots live when, by all laws of the game, they should be dead.

While getting in his August time, More Battles, with his ship headed for the hangars on its take-off, failed to lift the crate from the ground. The plane was frail but the hangar's steel side was tough, and More Battles was tougher.

"It was the summer heat," he said. "Nobody could have lifted a ship off the ground in such rare air."

At the time, Beulah Field's sky was full of student flyers. A few hours later, with a second craft, he gave it another try.

TOWARD the end of September, the major went out for that month's flying time. On his first landing, coming in above the north field patch of goldenrod, the major seemed to be making a perfect set-down some fifty or sixty feet in the air. And he did everything but step out at that altitude. Then the plane crashed—a complete wreck.

"It was my damned hay fever," More Battles explained. "Just as I was about to set her down, the pollen from that damned goldenrod got to me and I sneezed.

"Nobody," More Battles avowed, "can land a plane while sneezing from pollen goldenrod on the north end of a field."

Beulah Field had plenty more ships so the major put in the rest of his required flying time.

Nothing happened in October. During that month, the major was in Washington telling the war college just what is meant by flight. It is likely that he put in his flying time at Washington's Air Corps post, Bolling Field. And, also, it is likely that the major cheated a bit. To the lasting honor of all Air Corps officers let it be noted that while in Washington they do as do the Washingtonians.

Late November found snow at Beulah Field. And More Battles' flying time was late too. So he went out to qualify. They say that his take-off was good—not perfect, of course, but very good for a major. And people all over the county say that More Battles flew down roads, under trees, beneath bridges, through culverts and on into lasting fame. An hour and a half after his take-off, the field ambulance brought him back from a town sixty miles away. Two days later, More Battles regained this world of ruined Armies, Navies and enforced flying hours.

"It was snow blindness," he said. "I couldn't see a thing. Nobody could fly a plane while snow blinded."

"The old boy's cuckoo," the ambulance driver told the world. "When I picked him up, his goggles were still on his head.

The lenses were covered with oil. That old motor must have had a bad leak and was spraying the stuff. More Battles didn't know enough to wipe it off. Snow blind! They ain't no snow in the valley where he crashed."

December, for More Battles, was just another month. When a major has two broken arms, a stove in face and many other major causes for quiet, flying does not interest him at all. What is more, Air Corps does not expect him to fly and it pays him double for being where he can not destroy equipment. It's only fair.

Toward the end of that month, without a word of warning, Santa Claus and Dan Cupid came along. And they came so close together that More Battles could not tell which was which. Maybe it was the bum liquor, eh? Anyway, Dan pointed out the major's red headed nurse to the major and said, "I've warned you". But the major was just an average low flying major and would not be warned.

During the Christmas furlough period More Battles was the sole inmate of the Beulah hospital. On an Army post, to keep 'em in during a furlough period, you've got to break at least two arms and a couple legs. No kiddin', when a chance to leave the post for two weeks comes along, the outfit goldbricks call for their clothes, quit the hospital's refuge and start going places. So the major was alone, alone with love and a red headed nurse. Two's never a crowd, but it's likely to become a major engagement. And with the enlisted men gone, even a major can look at a nurse.

Somehow or other, you pity a guy with two busted wings; and especially at holiday time. So with this tough break riding him, More Battles wormed his way into Iodine Ida's heart—she being the red headed one.

"Oh, he's not so bad," Iodine told some of her associates when urged to defend her weakness. "Why, I remember the time in France when I nursed an M. P.—Ye Gods!

"And Major Kegg is like them, like an M. P., and seems to have no friends."

Well, love's like that, quick and brainless. Here today and gone tomorrow. To say nothing about dusk coming so quickly in the tropics and all nurses being alike.

Ida Engle, all kidding aside, was an ace; the "Iodine" thing was not a knock. Why, the gang in France would have nicknamed saints, and did. Ida's red top, under certain conditions—for instance when the smoke of a burning ammunition dump was covering the sun—had the hue of iodine. Hence the name, and it was a work of outfit love, and greater love has no man than his outfit love. This outfit and that outfit and many outfits had known Iodine Ida Engle; and this gang that gang and the other gang will never forget her. And now to think that she was falling for More Battles. Enough to start a war.

LATE in January, after the last of the A. W. O. L's had returned and resumed their hospital goldbricking, the major felt the competition too keenly and crawled out to be marked duty. But he was a changed man, and Beulah was a far different post. Its borrowed time commandant was less cocky, and always cold sober.

"No one," Major Kegg said, "among my pilots flys as poorly as I."

Having worked during the holidays, Ida Engle drew down a furlough—a thirty day stretch—which started the last week in January. She went home to Council Falls, a hundred miles upriver. And Beulah Field carried on with a cow eyed major watching headquarter's calendar and hoping for the train that would bring Iodine back again.

You'd never have looked for that in More Battles Kegg. No, sir, of all men, he would be the last expected to succumb to the monster called Puppy Love. But the guy was sure hard hit. What was worse, the thing, as a rule, is not done in either branches of service. In our royal

family, the royalists remain royal and marry their equals. The field was on edge waiting for old Down With Liquor Kegg to get wind of his son's affair.

"River cities hard hit by early freshet," the papers announced one day in mid February. "Rain continues."

"Both bridges go out at Council Falls," the same papers read next day. Then Major Keggs and Beulah's personnel sat up and took notice. Without cessation the upstate storms continued, then, on the fourth day, word came out of Council Falls that an epidemic of typhoid was rampant. The information and plea for antitoxin came from Iodine and was aimed right plump at Beulah.

"The bridges are out," she said. "Our town, Council Falls, is on an island. This message goes out through the flood with a man big enough to make a try. Beulah Field is big too. No landing place here. Use parachutes. And do it now. Waiting."

At Beulah Field's headquarters, Major Kegg came to par.

"Get the flight surgeon," he commanded his adjutant. "And have him secure the necessary serum. Get the parachute section and have the sergeant in charge provide as many small 'chutes as the surgeon stipulates. Call the chief of flight section and have him service a D. H. for me; tell him to have it running on the line within twenty minutes. Get the officer in charge of flying and have him pick a good—the best—parachute dropping mechanic in the command. Now I'm going to my quarters to get ready, and—"

"You?" the adjutant questioned, bewilderedly. "You going to fly, sir?" Rain came through the door Kegg opened.

"Me," More Battles turned at the threshold to say. "Yes, I'm going to give it a whirl, Captain. There's no flying visibility, I know. And the ceiling's right on the ground. This thing calls for low flying, and who in the service knows more about low flying than I? Have everything ready, Captain."

THE FLIGHT surgeon had a limited supply of typhoid serum; but a hospital three miles from Beulah had more and he telephoned for that. Ten minutes later a car swung through the main gate, cut for the post hospital, and the surgeon was all set.

On the line, afront headquarters hangar, a D. H's motor was barking and Major Kegg paced anxiously back and forth.

"The flight surgeon?" he questioned. "Where'n hell's that bird?"

Minutes later, strapping a parachute to his round person, the flight surgeon came toward the plane.

"Where's the serum?" the major asked.

"Here," the fat one answered and slapped his chest. "Got it stacked here and here and here." And he indicated several different places.

"Turn it over to parachute section," Major Kegg yelled. "Man, you're delaying the game."

"Tut-tut," the fat boy said. Only flight surgeons can say tut-tut to C. O.'s. "Major, I know this town of Council Falls. The whole island is only one small dot in two large rivers. Not in a thousand tries would you hit it with a parachute—that is, a parachute thrown over the side. And this serum is too valuable to chuck away."

"Well, what's the answer; and what's the idea?" the major crescendoed. "What are you going to do?"

"I'll do a lift-off from the wing. I've seen the enlisted men do it at low altitudes, and I'm almost as good as any enlisted man. Anyway, they'll need me in Council Falls. I'll bet there's not more than a few medics in the place. Are we set to shove off?"

Major Kegg was stopped. Finally, he fished for and found words.

"I gladly bow low to a brave man," he said, "but tell me how in the devil is a fat guy like you going to get out of a rear cockpit, crawl out on a wing, and get in position for a parachute lift-off?"

"That's my problem," the other barked.

"Fat guys like me—including Nero and little roly-poly Napoleon—have been getting out of back windows and over high fences for ages. Now, if you'll leave a little to the imagination, sir, I'll get one fat boy out on that wing . . . Which wing do you want me to lift away from?"

"The right," Major Kegg decided. "I can carry you best on the right lower. But hell, man, with this storm we can't get altitude enough for a live jump. You'll break your neck sure."

"Fifty or sixty feet altitude will be enough for a lift-off," the flight surgeon insisted. "Now, major, on the north tip of Council Falls island there's a small race track and fair grounds. That's where I want to lift off because the backwaters from both rivers are quietest in that vicinity; and if I miss the island, there's still a chance to swim ashore with the flood. . . . Let's shake a leg, sir. It'll be dark before we know it."

"I'm still skeptical," Major Kegg said. "Getting out on the wing of a D. H. in full flight is a young man's job. Why, the slipstream blast is terrific."

"By hell, sir," the fat one exploded, "you treat me juvenile! Don't you know that I have all kinds of cups for weight lifting, the tug-of-war and note bearing? Do you recall the old Jenny fuselage you found on top of headquarters' roof last Halloween? Well, I put that there single handed. I'm agile, sir. Let's shove off."

The heavy D. H. plane waddled and splashed through the mud, bounced a few times, howled on a high note, and they were in the air. Through the tree tops and along the road, the D. H. ghosted to the north. Under its grounded sky and ceaseless downpour, the early twilight of the sodden upcountry gathered them in; and the low flying major went down close to the river's troubled waters, poked a tense face to one side of his smeared windshield and hit the ball.

The minutes and miles that followed seemed to upset all old time arguments against hedge hopping, close to the ground flight. The major certainly knew his ground work and showed an uncanny aptitude for twisting and turning with the stream; to say nothing of missing several bridges and never ending overhanging trees along the line of flight. But the major was quite welcome. Nobody in air would have envied him the job. That D. H. was knocking off all of 120 miles per hour; and if a plane hits the ground at that speed—well, Confucius is eternally wrong and the riders are dead. Falling hurts least those who fly low is only a half truth at best. The crash tells the other half.

LESS than an hour's flight gave them the lights of Council Falls. To look the ground over, the major crossed the island's roofs with a few feet to spare, examined the north end race track, and circled down wind. A few miles below town, he again headed into the blow, gave the flight surgeon the high sign, throttled his motor and waited for the fat boy to do his stuff.

"She's a rough looking layout," he yelled as the surgeon crawled above the front cockpit, clung to the center section's wires and struts, and stretched a leg to the lower right wing.

"Watch your step, Doc. And the best of good luck."

"Say to the gang you saw me," the surgeon yelled back, "and that my wings were spotlessly white . . . Now stall her low and slow, Major . . . Attaboy!" And he moved from speaking distance to a stand behind the outer rear strut, then waved that he was set.

When the D. H. came in above the south end of Council Falls, the major had slightly more than a hundred feet under his craft. This altitude gave him the town's lights only now and then through the rolling black, but, for the surgeon's lift-off, it made things safer. At the last minute he stalled still slower. Then, as the fair grounds blurred aft of his tail, he yelled to the surgeon to jump, and strove to make that plane stand still, fell-off-on-a-wing, and knew a great thankful thrill when he saw the parachute's silk trail out,

whip and open. Down to the island, the flight surgeon floated.

Nation wide publicity told of that parachute jump and the fat surgeon's subsequent heroic service. Nothing new can be added now in this telling. Toward the end of the week, however, the press of the world told of an acute food shortage in the unfortunate river town. Also, upstate weather reports offered no promise; and water, water, and ever more water came into the lowlands.

Back at Beulah Field Major Kegg and the Red Cross officials sat tensely about a great table.

"Pack and pad the food in two hundred pound boxes," the major finally told them, "and my pilots will do the rest. I have seven D. H.'s on this reservation, and the boys will fly till the last motor quits, willingly. Get the stuff out today. We'll be waiting."

Then the parachute section was called, and ordered to have all available parachutes handy. The flight section reported an "all in commission" for the seven D. H.'s; and the officer in charge of flying turned out a mob of pilots and willing field mechanics. A job was to be done; and there were no end of doers.

American ingenuity is a jack-in-the-box. Just let necessity spring the hook of dire need and something worth while is sure to jump out. Before the Red Cross had delivered its first few tons of boxed food, mechanics had contrived to use the regulation D. H. bomb racks as carriers for the supplies to be parachuted. Each box was strapped to a dummy bomb and placed one under either lower wing. The parachute for each box was tied lightly at the base of the inner bay rear interwing struts; and the release ring of the 'chute was tied solidly to the ship. Then, when Council Falls came under, the bomb release triggers would drop the works. The falling weight would pull the release, and there you were.

When the boxes arrived the application was simple. Seven times four hundred pounds of food is a worth while load for any flight. And just as dusk was creeping into the wet world, the last of his pilots reported ready to Major Kegg.

"To your ships," the C. O. ordered. "And follow me close. When we arrive at Council Falls, I'll drop my load first, then each of you in turn drop yours. After we've unloaded, we break formation and streak for home. Every man for himself—and I know I'll be the last back. Maybe I'll get lost in the dark."

Upriver, following closely and low, six pilots mixed work and pleasure—with the former in the ascendency. As they went further into the black, respect for the man out front grew and grew. And the man out front pounded his old ship on the tail, stuck close to the river, and went in and came out and went in and came out of clouds. It rained. Wind blew and trees tossed. It was a hell of an evening for a flight. But they knew what you all know—that any guy who will take a ship in his lap and face a night like this, with six other propellers nibbling at his rudder, must be man sized. Kegg was winning friends where once he'd only subordinates.

The last few miles into Council Falls offered a much improved sky, and when the rioting confluence of rivers came below their planes, the flight had won an altitude of three hundred feet. For parachute work, that height was none too much; hardly enough, in fact. But the major, with the wind still out of the north, dropped his load just upstream of the race track, and the following planes got rid of theirs. The rivers accounted for a few parachutes; and one, failing to open, sent its two hundred pound box into a cellar via the roof and two intervening floors. On the whole, though, the food arrived and the job was good. One by one the ships cut formation, flew a down river turn and headed for home.

NEXT day was Sunday. The Army likes its Sundays off; likes to keep them free of work. But on this Sunday there was more work to be done; and Major Kegg had closed the post and ordered all hands to stand by.

At daybreak, flying a BXIL transport plane, the major was on his way, alone, to Elves Field. The distance was more than two hundred miles. He was after more parachutes. By 10:30 his BXIL, with fourteen borrowed umbrellas, was back at Beulah; and the command was on its toes, bomb loading more boxed food and getting set for another push northward. At 11:00 the flight went up.

The rain had stopped, and the clouds were trying to get away. There was a lot of wind and the planes bounced, bumped, rolled and sank. Also, as yet, the flying was still down among the hills, for the blowing storm was tumbling across the high places, flooding the low areas and making life hard for birds. Out front, the low flying major went right ahead, never departed the guiding river, and brought Council Falls into sight just at noon.

This time, with daylight favoring, the parachute dropping went over one hundred percent. Fact is, they made an Army record. All hits. And to think that the Navy was not there to see it. But the Navy's never out on wet days.

That afternoon the sun came out. The thermometer also went into a decline, and the state wide thaw ended. By night the north country was beginning to tighten up; and when another morning came, the rivers were beginning to shrink. The emergency had passed.

Beulah Field busied itself with the rehabilitation of seven D. H.'s that had been worked to death. Planes are not like ten ton trucks, things that you can pound on the tail through long hours and expect to stand up. They're frail, and pets, and must be handled as such. For every hour spent in the air, five or six must be used in overhauling.

Beulah's C. O., with his heart in Council Falls, paced headquarters. He waited.

A few days passed. The newspapers reported that the river towns—giving much space to Council Falls—had all regained contact with the outer world, Major Kegg waited, and hoped.

A few days more passed before headquarters received a glad wire. Iodine Ida Engle wired that she was soon to leave for Beulah. Kegg whistled quick snatches from long dead, light operas.

Then, within the hour, the major received a sad wire. This wire was from Council Falls too, from the fat flight surgeon.

COMING HOME STOP THERE HAS BEEN A WEDDING STOP TOOK ME THREE YEARS TO MAKE MISS ENGLE SAY YES STOP KILL ALL THE CALVES FATTED OR OTHERWISE STOP BUT IF BEULAH GANG CONTEMPLATES ANY ROUGH STUFF STOP STOP STOP

Major Kegg went out and got drunk.

Stop— He only got half shot, then came back to Beulah to lay in wait for the surgeon and the bride.

Beulah Field was all set for the homecoming. There were no fatted calves in the neighborhood, but the cooks had played havoc with a nearby farmer's chicken coop. Then they invited the farmer to come to the feast.

The C. O. was hard to find. After a manner, he had holed up. That was wrong, for there is an ancient custom in service incumbent upon Kegg. If a C. O. has not already done so, he is supposed and privileged to kiss the under officer's bride.

The bridal couple came in on the evening train. The food went on at nine. The noise was at its peak along toward eleven. And Kegg broke ground at twelve.

"I'll kiss that red headed baby," he told his dog robber at that hour. "And if that fat blimp says anything to me, I'll poke him in the kisser.

"Help me on with these damn' boots, boy. An' give me a stiff jolt of rancid motor oil. So long. See you later. I'll kiss the red headed woman as made a fool outa me."

Kegg did that very thing. He booted his way right into the thickest of the festivities, found Iodine, picked her out of a chair and put a kiss where a kiss belongs. The girl screamed and pasted a regulation major where a regulation major least expects to be pasted. And the regulation

major turned loose and fell back a pace or two.

THERE was a great quiet in the place, and nobody broke it. Through the swinging doors of the kitchen you could hear the Chinese boys whispering. The moment was tense.

"'Lo, Major," the fat flight surgeon finally yelled from his end of the table. "Come here, Kegg, old dog—meet the bride. Damn your old hide, Kegg, where you been hiding out? Is this any way to treat the world's best parachute jumper?"

Major Kegg oriented his stupid gaze till he had Iodine rightly placed. Then he shifted a few points and lined up the fat one, and the latter, when he said, "Meet the bride," wasn't referring to Red Head. It was all very strange. Too strange for a half shot major.

The major had arrived full of fight and now, somehow or other, there was nothing, nobody to fight. Everybody was happy. Even his adjutant was hilarious; and an Air Corps adjutant, found hilarious without warning, is a *rara avis*—a very rare bird indeed. Kegg swung on his adjutant and demanded—

"What you laughing at, Captain?"

The adjutant stopped laughing. Adjutants are quick that way—quicker stoppers than low flyers even.

"It's funny, Major," the adjutant giggled. "'S funny."

"T'hell you say," the C. O. barked. "Wha'd'y mean?"

" 'S funny. Yes, it—"

"'S goofy," the flight surgeon put in. "Goofy."

"Look here," the C. O. yelled. "What's this all about, eh?"

"Wel!," the adjutant explained, "the doc married Miss Engle—ha-ha!—an' you thought he married Miss Engle. 'S damn' funny."

"Yeh?" Kegg questioned. "I thought he married Miss Engle and he only married Miss Engle. Now what's funny? Come on—tell us what's so funny"

"Haw—haw!" the adjutant roared.

The flight surgeon was beginning to see daylight, and for the first time began to realize that his wire must have had something to do with Kegg's unmilitary manner. He laughed too. As has been said, a flight surgeon, belonging to another branch of the royal family—Medical Corps—can either tut-tut or haw-haw anybody, anywhere, anytime.

"Y'old devil, Kegg," he bellowed. "My wire put you wrong. I said I married Miss Engle, an' by hell, Kegg, you thought I meant Miss Engle. Tha's funny. Wow! Tha's very funny!

The officer in charge of flying said it was funny.

The adjutant, after another drink or two, agreed.

All the flying lieutenants staggered to their feet to slap Kegg's back and say it was funny.

That red headed girl, Iodine Ida Engle, after the first thrill that comes with the slapping of a major's face, had a quick softening of the heart and laughed too. All of which did not help the major's state of mind one little bit.

"The funniest thing I ever heard of, Major," she finally said. "Oh, it's so foolish and so outrageously funny."

"To you," Kegg shot back and pouted. Ah, yes. Majors can pout, prettily.

"To everybody," Iodine laughed. "Why, silly—big silly—the flight surgeon and Edith have been engaged, after a fashion, for three years."

"Edith?" Kegg questioned. "Edith who?"

"Stupid," Iodine purred, "must we draw pictures and intricate diagrams for you? That blushing bride at the doctor's side is my sister Edith. Do you think for a minute that the big hearted surgeon made that parachute jump just for exercise, or because he had the cause of suffering humanity at heart? No, foolish, he was going a-courting."

"Here here, now lay off me," the fat boy begged. "I can jump as good as any enlisted man. I'm agile, I am—Just watch me chin myself on this chandelier."

With the room in complete darkness the eating stopped. Major Kegg was laughing.

"A dumbbell is what I am," he said. "My 'pologies, Doc."

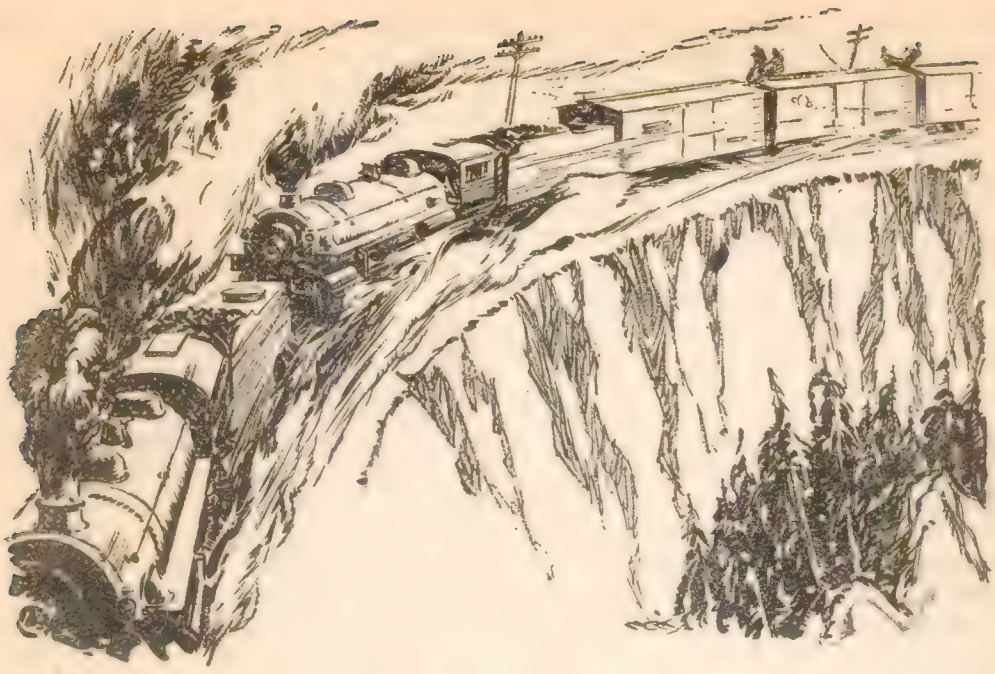
"'S all right," the flight surgeon told him. "Le's you and me make a night flight, Kegg. 'S nice moon. Le's go."

Nobody could stop them. Without benefit of enlisted men they trundled a plane to the starting line—a thing that has been done at the end of many a drunk—and got set to take off.

HAVING done this without benefit of, or advice from the enlisted men, they did not know that the ship's gasoline tank was nearly empty. They got into the air and flew for about fifteen minutes. But during that quarter of an hour, Major Kegg did what he had never done before—he went out for altitude. And when the motor stopped, he had six thousand feet of the useless stuff under him and no idea how to dispose of so much vertical space. That is, he did not know how to dispose of it and, in the end, get back to Beulah Field.

However, the powerless plane came down of its own accord, some two or three miles west of the reservation. They almost could hear the crash at Beulah, and the major and flight surgeon came home in an ambulance.

Sister Edith, like Iodine, was a nurse. This made the thing jake. For weeks and weeks, the foursome stuck close to the post hospital, grew to like one another, and agreed that something had been very, very funny—but they could not recall what.



CRIMSON LIGHTS

A Story of Heroism on the Death Grade of a Western Railroad

By E. S. DELLINGER

BEFORE Billie Wilkerson volunteered, he was pulling through freight out of Albany on the H and R. He had a good job, a good girl, and good health. But one dark, rainy night "over there", when he was herding a train of supply trucks up to the front in the Verdun sector, a piece of shrapnel in the shoulder and a bit of chlorine gas in his lungs rather queered things for him. They started him on a streak of hard luck that did not end in France.

Some fellow whom he had never seen before, nor ever expected to see again, pulled him out from under the smashed truck and turned him over to the surgeons in the emergency hospital. Upon his return, he still had his job. Uncle Sam and the company had seen to it that he did have. But neither our dearly beloved Uncle, nor the company nor any other human agency could keep that girl of his heartwhole and single until he got back to Albany. When he made his first run on the old job after the Armistice was signed, the girl was helping a student fireman rear railroad men for the next generation.

Like most lovesick men, the first thing Billie thought of was moving. His perfectly good job and the ten years seniority

that went with it had lost some of its attractions. It lost even more when the company doctor told him he was propagating a chestful of T. B. bugs that would do for him within a couple of years, unless he sloughed off his job and all that went with it, and retreated with his million measly germs to the dry country west of "ninety-six".

That is why we find him pulling coal drags off the Dawson branch and wheeling hotshot merchandise on the main line out of Tecumseh. It was all brave enough to say half bitterly, as he sometimes did—

"Why in the hell couldn't they let a fellow die over there an' be done with it?"

That is what he said. But when it came to making a decision as to whether he should go West or stay on the H and R, Billie coolly figured he would rather be a perfectly good customer for "T-bone, rare" and "two soft boiled" in the Golden Spoon in Tecumseh, than to be the source of life for a four by six grass plot back in Albany.

All might have gone smoothly on his new job if he had not got mixed up with the fluffy blonde who waited night shift in the Golden Spoon. Tommy Carson considered that girl his own personal property. None of the home boys on the D and R ever questioned his seniority with her, not in the least. He had been first out with her ever since she hit Tecumseh. But from the very day Wilkerson blew into town, the boys all knew Carson did not hold exclusive rights on that beanery belle. Billie was fully as handsome and as free a spender as Tommy ever was. Consequently he took her to the picture show, and parked with her in the roadster down by the sandstone bluff fully as often as Carson did.

Carson could not say anything about the girl; but he resented Billie's interference just the same. Still, nothing might ever have come of it if Billie had not been called out on second No. 32 one September night. He was headed into Tecumseh from the West. His tallow pot had the old No. 2544 hot and full of water. He had the Johnson bar hooked up a couple of notches off center and the steam pouring through a half throttle as he went tolling down across Chaves Arroyo, carpeted with tufts of gray sage and soap weeds, making a run for the hill beyond the bridge. Yellow refrees* trailing odors of oranges and apples and fresh lettuce formed a band of color against the spangled sky of blue.

CLANG—raw-aw-awk—clank—ping! sang door and scoop as the fireman tossed in coal to keep the old jack hot for the long climb. The swaying cab lurched right, as they took a left curve. That was the signal for the fireman to stick his scoop, climb to the seat box and shove his head out into the night air where he could watch the track on the left curve.

The block signal board was at caution, its yellow light showing clearly.

"Forty-five," called the fireman, notifying the engineer of the position of the signal.

"What the hell?" questioned Billie, easing off his throttle and reaching into two hip pockets at once for train orders and time card.

"We've not overlooked anybody, have we, kid?"

Billie thought that, being new on the job, he might have overlooked a meeting point. That is always the first thought that comes to an engineer when he sees a caution block where he is not expecting to see it.

"Naw," replied the fireman. "You ain't overlooked anybody. That's jist some mudheel foolin' along tryin' to make overtime."

He tossed his cigaret stub out of the window. Billie crossed the cab to stand behind him.

"There's nobody out of Gammon ahead of us except first No. 32, an' they registered out three hours before we did. They ought to be in Tecumseh asleep by this time. That wouldn't be them kickin' up the yellow ahead of us."

"Maybe it couldn't," returned the fire-

*Refrigerator cars.

man, "but I'll bet four bits that's exactly who it is."

"Couldn't be, kid. Couldn't be. Your crack hoghead's on that first No. 32. He'd never in the world let a new man on the job pick up three hours on him in a hundred miles."

"Crack hoghead? Who y' mean?"

"Oh, that bird you guys always talkin' about bein' such a wonder. What's his name? Carson. Yeah, Carson's on that first No. 32."

"Now lissen here, smart boy. Don't you go makin' no slurrin' remarks about Tommy Carson. He knows his onions, and he ain't afraid to widen on these high wheeled babies an' let 'em eat up the miles. If that's Tommy Carson an' he's fallin' down on his schedule, you can go tell the cock eyed, frownin' world he's got a good reason why."

The fireman stepped down to scoop in more coal. Wilkerson shrugged his shoulders. The beanery blonde was not the only bone of contention Wilkerson and Carson had found. Until this fall, Carson had been the only young man on the division who ever scorched any journal boxes or kinked any hundred-twenty pound rails with fast running. But Wilkerson, who knew a few tricks about handling the old No. 2500's that Carson had failed to learn, soon proved to the officials, the car whackers, and the section men that he, too, was not afraid to wheel them. On the Albany, he had been exactly what Carson was here—the high stepping, rail kinking Casey Jones of the division. Consequently it rankled in his chest just a little when the fireman flared up and stood for Carson.

For three straight hours they trailed along behind a pair of red tail lights. Every block signal they passed was either red or yellow; and every time he slowed down for a caution board, Billie called down curses upon the soul of the black hearted villain who was trying to kill time with fast fruit. Even the fireman vented curses that would make the blood run cold, but for forty miles, their highest speed was twenty miles an hour. Of course neither Billie nor his fireman knew that the engine ahead was not steaming. It would not have made a bit of difference if they had. They would have cursed just as roundly and been just as sore when they dragged into the Tecumseh yards in time to go to bed at sunrise.

BILLIE WILKERSON had already washed and changed clothes and was headed for the Golden Spoon by the time Carson had made out his repair report and put away his engine. Stalking into the restaurant, he slammed his grip down and flopped into a chair at one of the tables. High altitudes wreck a man's physique when he first climbs into them for his health.

"Gimme a T-bone, rare, an' a cup o' java, please. An' make it snappy, will you?"

The fluffy blonde, who had come to place the card before him, rested plump hands on rounded hips and stared at him in mock amazement.

"Why, Albany!" she exclaimed. "What on earth's eatin' on you this mornin'? You look like you was mad enough to eat a keg o' red hot nails rare, an' digest 'em, too."

"Oh, these poultry livered hogheads out here on the D and R gits my goat. Some of 'em ought to be drivin' burro wagons instead o' tryin' to pull fruit an' merchandise. I've been foolin' along behind one of 'em ever since midnight. Thought I was goin' to make a decent trip for once an' git home in time to sleep awhile before the chickens woke up. An' here I come draggin' in at daylight."

That was an unkind and an unwise crack for one engineer to make about another. It was not at all like Billie Wilkerson to make it, either. His motto had always been, "If you can't say somethin' good about another hogger—why, keep your mouth shut."

But when those T. B. bugs get clawing inside a man's chest as if they were trying to tear the very innards out of him, an' when the fever speeds up his heart and

makes it beat "dot and carry one", he sometimes turns loose a line of talk entirely foreign to his nature. That may be why Billie said what he did.

At any rate, the words had hardly passed when the subject of them slammed down his grip beside the door and sat at the counter. The blonde, who had not spoken a word since Wilkerson made his remark, left his table and went to get Carson's order. All the time he was eating, she sat behind the counter and talked to him in a low tone, laughing softly once when she told him something that seemed particularly funny.

Tommy Carson was in no mood for foolishness when he came in off this fourteen hour run. He had been impatiently nursing a leaky, wheezy, coal destroying scrap heap over the road, petting it when he wanted it to pull a hump, and when he had to stop and blow up steam, cursing it, its inventor, the shop men who OK'd it for service and the company which clung to it after it had outlived its usefulness. Carson had come into the restaurant with blood in his eye. Almost from the moment the blonde began talking to him, he was snorting mad. Wilkerson, of course, did not know that. He paid no attention to the girl or Carson. He was too sick, homesick and disgusted to pay attention to anything.

His first realization that something was wrong came when, grip in hand, he stepped out of the door. Carson, having bolted half his breakfast and left the other half on his plate, was waiting. The high crowned blue and white striped cap was pushed back from the roots of his brown hair. As the man from Albany closed the door, Carson flipped his freshly lighted cigaret into the street and stepped forward.

"Wanna see you a minute, Wilkerson," he began, speaking in a low voice.

Wilkerson set down his grip and faced the other, wondering what Carson could want with him.

"I wanna know just who you was meanin' by the poultry livered hogheads on this D and R. You was speakin' somethin' about 'em to the girl a while ago. Was you meanin' me?"

He glowered at the man from Albany. Wilkerson coolly and fearlessly returned his stare.

"So you was the lowdown cuss that was foolin' along ahead o' me, forcin' me to use three hours for a one hour's run."

"I had steam in a damned ole junk pile with wheels under it, tryin' to drag first No. 32 in with it, if that's what you want to know."

"Well, if you was pullin' first No. 32, then you're exactly the man I was referrin' to. Why in the hell didn't you either *go* or git in the hole an' let me by you so I could come on to town?"

Both men were crazy with rage.

Night runs and leaky flues and nerve wracking slow boards are not conducive to sweet temper. The heavenly angels themselves would soon become venomous crabs if they had to run freight trains on the graveyard shift.

Carson, lower jaw squared, fists doubled, took two steps toward Wilkerson and snarled into his face:

"You damned alecky boomer, I'll learn you to keep your insinuatin' remarks to yourself when you're workin' on the D and R. I knowed why I wasn't runnin', an' I knowed why I didn't git in the hole an' let you by. I'm poultry livered, am I?"

He made a lunge at the man from Albany. Billie threw up a hand and parried the blow. Then he dealt Carson an ugly smash on the nose and took one that almost closed his left eye. Around and around they went, sparring, striking, clinching, each trying to pound the other into a pulp.

THE BLONDE, two brakemen, a switch crew and a call boy were gathered there on the sidewalk in the early dawn. Sympathy was with Carson. He had spent his life in Tecumseh, earned his promotion on the D and R. That made a big difference among the men. In these days of slow promotion, when a man has to

work on a job from six to twelve years before he can get a regular run as engineer or conductor, the men feel a certain resentment at the employment of a promoted man from another road. Even though a fellow had swung the scoop or the light on another division and there earned his promotion, it is very difficult for him to secure and hold a position as a promoted man.

They would rather work day and night during rush seasons than to see the office employ a stranger in one of these coveted positions. So, sympathy being with Carson, who had always been on the D and R, there would be no interference from the group of watchers as long as Carson was not getting the worst of the fight.

The two men appeared to be about evenly matched. But the ravages made by disease in the body of the man from the East, gave the other an advantage that was not apparent. His offense weakened. His defense broke. His breath was coming in short gasps. His face was purple. He was fighting a losing fight. He knew it from the first blow, but he was game to see it through. He coughed, strangled, coughed again. The night marshal came running around the corner. Quickly he separated the two men. Carson, defiant, vindictive, was taken away by his friends, swearing to finish the job. Billie staggered up to his room and dropped upon the bed, coughing, breathing with difficulty. He was licked and he knew it, but he knew also that T. B. germs, not Carson, had done the job.

Billie could not go out the next day. He was too weak and sick. Not daring to see a physician in Tecumseh because of the nature of his malady, he secured a leave of absence and went down to Albuquerque to a sanitarium where he could have rest and the right kind of attention. Carson's friends had many a big laugh about the guy off the H and R who had come out to show the Western boys how to get trains over the road. They had all agreed that he had left town because he was afraid of Carson. Carson himself had nothing to say. Perhaps he suspected the reason for Wilkerson's departure.

Billie was in Albuquerque for two months before he again reported for duty. He expected that Carson would try to find an excuse to give him another beating; he was not sure Carson could do it. But in his expectation of further trouble he was mistaken. Carson completely ignored him—would not even speak on the street.

Sometimes Billie would sit in the lobby of the rooming house and watch Tommy Carson. There seemed to be something familiar about the man that he had not noticed in his past experience with him. He could not fix in his memory the exact connection, so he finally decided that he was mistaken.

Things went on in this way for months, Billie attending strictly to his own business, Carson with his strong following of home guard boys, trying to make life so disagreeable for Wilkerson that he would be compelled to quit and seek a new job.

Now in making life miserable for somebody else, Carson was an artist. He prevented Wilkerson's making worth while friends. The men all shunned Billie as the tramp shuns work. And since a railroad man out of friends is like an automobile out of oil, Billie knew without much thinking that it was only a question of time until he would be burned loose from his job.

The blonde, however, soon ceased to be a bone of contention. She quit town one night between midnight and daylight with a silk stocking salesman. But the silent, jealous conflict for speed honors went on unabated. Time after time, pulling merchandise west or fruit east, they brought in trains with cars whose journal boxes had scorched their packing with fast running. Finally, the motive department and the superintendent's office ruled that every engine marked up for these two men must have its speed recorder in repair so that by merely reading a strip of paper, they could determine the speed of the engine at every point on the division. But even then the rivals continued to break the limit, each hoping to

set a record for fast time. The officials were frantic. Both were valuable men; both careful, conscientious artists with the throttle. Pulling out of service had no effect whatever. Billie would get one of the jacks up to seventy miles an hour and keep it there for ten miles—ten days off and a threat of discharge if it happened again; then Carson, not to be outdone, would get one of them up to seventy-two for ten miles and get his ten days and the same threat. Thus they continued until October.

IT WAS during the strike among the shopmen and car repairers. Equipment was in bad condition. Air brakes were often useless. It was dangerous to be a railroad man in those days. A fellow never knew when he left home whether, upon his return, he would walk in at the door, or be carried through in a cracker box. Every trip was a slim chance, and the longer the strike continued, the slimmer the chance of getting home alive.

While the strike was at its worst, Billie got a call on the Dawson branch to bring down a load of coal. The hundred-twenty mile trip up was a real pleasure—caboose and ten empty coal cars, fast time, no stops except to meet a couple of coal drags and the regular mixed train.

But the return trip was anything but a pleasant jaunt. He got thirty cars of coal and the 3423 out of Dawson and picked up sixteen more at Wilmuth. That was the hoodoo—that cut of cars he got at Wilmuth. From the time he picked them up trouble began. First the air brake on the caboose went on the blink. The crew had to cut the air out of the car entirely so it would not set the caboose brake and, what was more important, so the air pressure would not register on the caboose gage—they could not tell whether they had air in the train pipe or not.

The very first time they stopped after this, they found they had somewhere in the train a "dynamiter", that is, a car with defective braking apparatus. When the brakes were set on the train in ordinary service application, the brake on that car would shoot into emergency, thereby locking the wheels, and causing the brakes on numbers of other cars in the train to go into emergency also. Conductor and brakeman walked the train from engine to caboose and back again, praying as they went, trying to find that dynamiter; but they could not locate it. At last Conductor Gordon came over to the head end and told Billie not to use the train brakes at all unless he had to—to handle all stops with the engine brake only.

But troubles did not stop there. In fact, that was only the beginning. Something next went wrong with the air pump on the engine. It would not function. Rules required that the engineer carry seventy pounds air pressure in the train-pipe to handle the brakes; but Billie's gage showed only sixty; and the pressure kept dropping back. He worked with the pump trying to locate the trouble, but finally had to give up and headed in at Conosco with brakes dragging on a dozen cars.

Wilkerson and Gordon, the conductor, reported to the despatcher in Tecumseh, explaining to him their predicament and asking for instructions. Thirty minutes later, they received orders to remain on duty in Conosco to bring the disabled engine and train on into Tecumseh as soon as a helper engine could be sent them to handle the brakes down Cabeza Hill.

Since the engine from Tecumseh would not arrive for several hours, Billie and Gordon walked leisurely back toward the head end. A dozen boys were playing around the train, climbing between the cars, heaving lumps of coal at each other and yelling like a band of wild Indians. For a few minutes, the engineer and conductor, becoming boys again, played with them. Then walking over to the engine, and finding comfort in the warmth of the cab, they soon forgot the boys at play.

The full moon shown bright as day. Snow capped peaks of the Costillas, ninety miles away, formed a scalloped border on the western fringe of the blue

mantle and nearer, rising out of the bald prairie, Baldy and Tenaja gleamed white with the first snow of the season. The boys quit their play and went home to bed. In the boiler, water bubbled and popped, keeping irregular time for the keen, brassy whine of dinning steam. Sulphurous smoke, backing out through cracks in the fire door, filled the cab with its odor. At irregular intervals, the broken air pump wheezed and screeched dismally.

Every half hour the fireman would get off his seat and swing in a few scoops of coal to keep the fire from going completely out. Talk grew desultory, died entirely. The four men, brakeman and fireman, engineer and conductor, nodded, snapped awake to look at watches, then nodded again. Finally the conductor, punching Wilkerson in the ribs, asked rather sleepily—

"Who you reckon they're sendin' out on that helper engine?"

"I don't know," responded Wilkerson. "We might walk back to the telephone an' ask."

He was glad of an excuse to get out and walk around. Soon the conductor had the dispatcher on the telephone.

"Hello! That you, Mac? Say, Mac, what engine you sendin' out to us? Yeah! The 3417? Yeah. Say, Mac, who's on 'er? What hogger?"

Gordon gurgled a short laugh as he hung up the receiver and faced Wilkerson.

"Mac said they was sendin' Tommy Carson," he said softly, watching carefully for the effect of his words.

The moonlight showed no effect. Billie acted as if he had been called to doublehead with Tommy Carson every day since he had been on the D and R. But inside he was wondering how Carson would act —wondering whether he would come back to the rear engine and inquire sympathetically what the trouble with the old hog was, as engineers are wont to do under these circumstances.

On this point he was not to be left long in doubt. A crossing whistle sounded away down the hill. Soon the 3417 came clattering back through the switch and coupled into the 3423. Wilkerson was down on the ground with torch and oil can, giving the old scrap heap one last loving pat before heading out. Carson dropped down and started back. He got back as far as the pilot of Wilkerson's engine, where he could see the other man plainly. He turned sharply on his heel and strode back to his engine without a word.

Before the air pump on the helper engine had quit talking, Gordon returned to the head end with the orders. As he delivered Tommy's copy to him, he remarked casually:

"We ain't testin' no air here tonight, Carson. We got a dynamiter back there in the train, an' every time you set the brakes, we have to rawhide around bleedin' 'em off the whole train by hand."

"O. K.," replied Carson. "What you say goes with me. Nobody else ever does test 'em here, anyhow."

He thumbed through his orders again, and as he slipped them into an overall pocket, asked:

"What's that extry 3408 they're makin' us wait here for? Another damn' coal drag they're runnin' around us?"

"No. It's that Johnson Carnival outfit that's been showin' up at Dawson for the last week. They're goin' down to Bernard to show tomorrow an' next day."

The headlight of the carnival train was a moving speck of light ten miles away across the mesa. Soon the engine whistled for the station and went thundering down through Conosco, the red and yellow coaches showing brightly under the light of the midnight moon—coaches carrying the hundred weary funmakers asleep in berths and bunks.

By the time the two red tail lights of the circus train had blended into one, the doubleheader coal drag was surging its groaning way out through the south switch and starting in pursuit. Tommy Carson, helped always by Billie Wilkerson, got his speed up to forty miles an hour, and then, though the limit for this particular piece of track was forty-five, he

shut off steam. Wilkerson shut off too. He was, according to custom, letting the man in charge of the head engine control the speed.

Carson's fireman kept looking across the cab at the grimly erect figure of the engineer. Finally he came over to the right side, rested a hand against Carson's leg and glanced up at the speedometer.

"Thought you was goin' to show that bird from Albany how they used to wheel 'em on the D and R before they put speed recorders on these new engines," he bantered.

Carson looked down into the grimy face, spat out a piece of gum he had been chewing, and replied slowly.

"Not here, kid. Not here. You don't catch this chicken foolin' with old Cabeza. After we git to the bottom o' the hill, we've got forty miles o' straight track an' a water grade down into Tecumseh. There's where I aim to make that chunk o' cheese wonder who's poultry livered."

He laughed bitterly.

"I aim," he continued, "to have these forty-seven cars o' coal singin' along at better than eighty as soon as we hit the bottom. I'm goin' into Tecumseh tonight with a dozen boxes blazin'. We'll make a real trip out of it while we're at it. We'll give the car whackers a job brassin' that they'll talk about for the rest o' their natural born days."

"Didn't the old man tell you last time he had you on the carpet for fast runnin' that next time you got a engine over fifty he was goin' to can you?"

Carson laughed.

"Did you think he meant that stuff, kid? You ain't been railroadin' a hell of a while, have you? You know damned well we've had 'em up to seventy-five per on the main line half a dozen times since then. Well, I'm still runnin' a engine, ain't I?"

The coal drag rounded a curve and came out upon a stretch of straight track leading down into Cabeza. For six miles there is a slight downgrade—just sufficient to keep up the momentum of the train or, if an engineer cares to take a chance, enough to give it a real plunge downward. Cabeza is in the bottom of a sag. The track swoops down steeply for the last quarter mile into the adobe village, then swoops upgrade for a few hundred yards to the top of the hump toward Tecumseh. It is on top of this hump that the coal chute and water tank are located. All freight trains stop here for coal and water and final brake inspection before taking the plunge down alongside the wall of Cabeza Gulch to Bernard.

WHEN the road was new, old hogheads used to use this piece of straight track as a ceremonial ground for initiating new men into the service of the D and R. They would work steam down to the foot of the hill and get the cars to rolling just as fast as the wheels would turn. The new men would think, of course, that they were going to start down Cabeza Gulch at that rate. But just as the engine struck the bottom of the sag at Cabeza, they would shoot on the air brakes and make a grandstand stop at the tank. It was hard on equipment, but it sifted the men for the service of the D and R. If there was any yellow in a student, he would make this his last trip. This hill was the place where these old daredevils had poured rabbit into the gizzard of many a student, teaching him that he either did not want to railroad at all, or else did not want to work for the D and R.

Carson's father had been the best of all the old set at this game. He had scared more yellownecks off the division than all the rest of the hogheads put together. And Tommy was just as much of a daredevil as his dad. He could run an engine just as fast as old Tom ever dared. The only reason he was not wheeling them here was that for this particular piece of track he had a sort of superstitious respect. One night when old Tom had been initiating a student, something had gone wrong with his brakes and he had failed to make his usual grandstand stop at the tank. That is why Tommy had been compelled to start firing for the D and R at nine-

teen. That was one lesson he had never forgotten, the lesson taught him by old Cabeza.

To the minds of the old time railroad families of Tecumseh, Cabeza Hill was a scheming personality—a hated thing demanding constant human sacrifice. Not one of those families but had given one or more members as victim to the insatiable demands of this ten miles of writhing, twisting steel. Every member of this crew tonight, with the exception of Wilkerson and Carson's fireman, could point to the spot where either a father or a brother had had his life snuffed out by the thing that was Cabeza.

As soon as the speck of red that was the circus train had tipped over the hump, and the green lights of the switch at Cabeza were showing clearly, Carson set his air to make the usual stop at the tank. Billie Wilkerson heard him set it—heard the hiss and whistle of the air, felt the grip of brakes taking hold of the wheels beneath him. He would not have set them for another ten car lengths; but, you see, he had not the respect for Cabeza that the older men felt. Nevertheless, he was glad a few seconds later that Carson had set them. The train was not slowing down as it should. Something was wrong. The engine was not leading the cars—the cars were shoving the engine.

He stared blankly across the cab at his fireman; reached for his useless brake valve. The fireman had felt that shoving, too. He came stumbling across the cab.

"What's the matter, Wilkerson? Ain't Carson goin' to let us stop here for water?"

"You know damned well he's tryin' to stop 'em, kid," replied Billie coolly.

"Then— We've— They're runnin' away with us?"

"Carson give 'em all the air he had back there at the milepost. You ain't seen 'em stop yet, have you?"

The fireman stuck his head around the end of the tank and looked back, watching for fire from the wheels—a sign that brakes were working. Soon he pulled himself inside and yelled out in terror:

"Look back there, man! Look! We ain't got brakes halfway back!"

WILKERSON was watching the approaching switch light. He did not need to look back. He knew from the first squirt of air what had happened—knew that the boys playing around the train at Conosco, had turned an angle cock in the train pipe, cutting off the air from the rear end of the train and rendering the brakes useless—knew that the failure of the crew to test the brakes when the new engine coupled on, together with the bad order condition of the caboose brake, had prevented their knowing that the air was cut out of the rear end of the train.

When he did look back, it was to see fire flying from the wheels of the four head cars. Behind that, darkness, except for the spark of light on the rear end frantically swinging a futile stop sign.

The fireman stood in the gangway paralyzed with fear. Wilkerson grasped his shoulder and said in a voice without a tremor:

"Don't go gittin' scared now, kid. We'll stop at the tank. The hump an' these engine brakes'll hold 'em from goin' over the hill."

Billie was not bluffing. He thought they would stop at the tank. Indeed, they had slowed to fifteen miles an hour by the time they had passed the coal chute; but the moment they tipped over the hump, the train began gathering speed. Both men knew they were going down Cabeza Hill without brakes.

The fireman stood in the gangway watching the fence posts flitting past faster and faster. The vision of a black casket with the remains of what had once been his twin brother arose before him.

"Ain't you goin' to jump, Wilkerson?" he questioned through trembling lips.

"No," was the calm reply. "I belong here, an' I'm goin' to stay."

"Then goodby, an' God save your fool soul," prayed the fireman as, crossing himself, he dropped down the steps and slipped off into the side ditch.

Wilkerson had already seized the coal pick and was pounding the handle out of it to use as a brake club. Just as he loosened it, Carson, followed by his fireman and the brakeman, came clambering through the front cab window. For the first time since the morning of the fight in Tecumseh, he spoke to the man from Albany.

"What you goin' to do," he questioned in quick, calm tones, looking at the club.

"Goin' back clubbin' down handbrakes," replied Wilkerson, stepping into the coal tender.

Carson grasped his sleeve.

"Don't be a fool, Wilkerson. You know damn' well you can't stop loads on this hill with handbrakes. Fools have tried that before. They're all dead now. The devil an' all his angels couldn't stop this outfit."

"We'd better all unload before we git goin' so fast we'll brake our fool necks," chimed in the brakeman. He, too, knew Cabeza.

Wilkerson hesitated just an instant while the two men argued. It was not yet too late for all of them to save themselves by jumping. Then his eyes narrowed to two slits and he faced Carson through the gloom of the rocking cab.

"Have you forgot that circus train, Carson?" he asked coldly.

"My God, yes!" screamed Carson. "Slick an' clean."

Before the words had echoed across the cab, Carson, having seized the coal scoop was jumping upon the handle, breaking it out for a club. Wilkerson was on top of the tender by the time Carson had his club ready. The brakeman and Carson's fireman, though they knew there was not a ghost of a chance of stopping the runaway, stayed with the two engineers. The four of them went hurrying back over the train.

For four miles out of Cabeza, the D and R drops down a heavy grade over track that is cut straight through shale, sandstone and limestone spurs, and carried across the intervening gulches on high trestles. The cañon is nearly straight in these upper stretches, so that the curves are not sharp or dangerous. But the stretch of comparatively straight track ends at Bernard, a coal town of six thousand people, built upon a sort of shelf, or bench, half a mile from the D and R, and reached by a spur track leading through a switch.

But from Bernard, the six miles to the bottom of the hill is one reverse curve after another. There is not a more crooked six miles of track in the United States. A few train and engine crews have tried seeing how fast they could go down this hill. But they are all dead now and the fellows who have replaced them do not, as Carson put it, "fool with old Cabeza".

Every mother's son of this crew tonight knew they could not stop the coal drag they were riding, knew it would be going so fast at the end of the first mile that air brakes could hardly stop it before it passed Bernard Switch. Still they were starting on the hand brakes with the half hope that they might hold it back a little so the circus train would have time to clear at Bernard. If three thousand tons of coal plowed into that train of brightly painted wooden coaches, there would not be anything left of it but kindling wood that had been equipment, and grease spots that had been people.

GRIMLY, doggedly, they were working, two to the wheel. Three miles out of Cabeza, ten brakes had been set and the men were trying to make their way over the coal to set more. Moonlight shot down through the piñon and scrub cedar on the cañon walls above them; moonlight flooded the racing cars, trying to show them their footing among the lumps of coal. Progress was almost impossible at the rate they were going, with the cars leaping up and down like springboards. But they finally reached the brake wheels.

The head shack and the fireman were twisting tight the brake on the head end of the twelfth coal car. Across the careening gulf between two cars, the two

engineers were twisting the brake on the rear end of the next one ahead, setting it so tightly that the wheels were almost sliding in spite of the terrific speed the heavy loads had attained. Both men were working like automatons, slipping clubs through brake wheel spokes, heaving, grunting, breathing hard as they sought to hold down the coal drag so the circus train could get into the clear at Bernard before they hit it.

Their train shot out of the cut and went rocking and leaping around the last, long sweeping curve above Bernard. Billie, who was facing forward, glimpsed glaring red, three flares of it, one low down—the light of an open switch—twins higher up—the pair of crimson tail lights; and lower still by the switch light, a white signal lamp was rising and falling, rapidly, frantically. The circus train was heading into Bernard Switch. The brakeman was standing by the switch, urging his engineer to snatch the train off the main track out of danger. The gap between the engines of the coal drag and the rear end of the circus train was closing rapidly. Like an arrow the two powerful mountain monsters, sloughing fire from every wheel, were driving straight toward the crimson lights.

Billie stopped his club in mid heave—glued his eyes upon the red. The blood left his face, and he caught his breath. Carson, too, straightened, and stood watching, lips apart. The fireman and the brakeman were crouching, clinging to the brake wheel, waiting for the crash that would beat out their lives and hurl them into eternity.

"God, fellers!" the brakeman screamed. "We're goin' to hit 'em!"

His voice was lost in the roar as their train straightened out on the track above Bernard Switch. All four were watching tensely; saw the red tail lights leave the straight line and go creeping slowly left; saw the switch light flash from red to green, as the brakeman set it back for the main line—the turn that would send them down among the curves of Cabeza. They saw the white signal light go rolling away to one side as the brakeman at the switch sought safety.

But the circus train had to move one hundred and twenty feet after it crossed the switch before it would be out of the way of their cavorting, roaring, thundering drag. Already it seemed to them the head engine should be crushing the right tail light. They braced themselves against the crash. They were still braced and breathless when the twin red lights were showing to the left, had passed, and one shone green behind them; when the dim lights of the coaches were darting past. Not until then did they know they had saved the circus train—saved it by inches.

By the switch of Bernard the men could have jumped, might have saved themselves if only they had been prepared. But so certain they were of crashing through the circus train, so engrossed had they been in watching the race between life and death, they had completely forgotten their own danger. They had let pass their sole chance of escape until the green switch light of Bernard was fading into the distance.

"Ain't we goin' to jump, fellers?" yelled the brakeman, finally coming to his senses.

"To late to jump now, pard," Carson answered above the roar. "We're goin' in the ditch down here on this first curve—right square where dad rammed the ole 91."

The brakeman stood watching the cañon open beneath them—watching the white sandstone rush sickeningly up through gashes toward them as they entered a cut. Nearing the first sharp curve, he lost his nerve. Turning loose the brake wheel, he hurled himself off into a sandstone cut. There was one wild cry of anguish, drowned by crashing noises, lost in the swelling distance.

The fireman stood as if ready to follow him. Carson, seeing the movement, cried out:

"Don't jump here, kid, fer God's sake. If you hit a cut, you'll go under the wheels—if you hit the open you're goin' clean to the bottom o' the cañon. Jump

when the head end starts pilin', an' take your chance."

IN THAT group of four, not another word was spoken. Carson and Wilkerson crouched side by side, clutching the same brake wheel, trying to hold their balance until the crash came. They were enemies no longer. Cause of strife was past.

As they entered the deep cut on the first sharp curve below Barnard—that curve which had claimed so many victims—there came the booming crash of engines quitting steel and hurling themselves against sandstone walls. The speed of the car upon which Wilkerson and Carson were riding checked suddenly, jerking them loose from the brake wheel and slamming them down among the lumps of coal.

Sounds became indistinguishable. Blended into terrific bedlam—the impact of engines striking sandstone walls and grinding along them, the crunching of timbers, the screech of steel against steel, the thud of wheels which, having left the rails, were lumping downward through the cut. Six million pounds of inanimate matter were forcing engines forward, urging cars to climb upon the backs of other cars in the mad rush to crush life from human beings.

The big coal car upon which the men were riding lifted at its rear end, the two still clinging to it. In one glimpse Wilkerson caught the scene about him—the full moon swimming in the cloud flecked sky, black clumps of piñon and scrub cedar feathering the sides of the cañon wall beyond the gulch, the coal dust rising in a dense fog, blotting out the lights from the engines. Then as the car kept rising higher and they were forced to jump, the two leaped away together to fall into the ditch beneath the heap of wreckage.

The conductor and the rear brakeman came hurrying over, calling in voices choked with awe and fright:

"Carson! Wilkerson! Red!"—calling men who would not answer.

Never had the D and R seen such a wreck. Forty-two cars of coal, a string almost half a mile in length, were dumped and piled together within a space less than six car lengths. A long car stood squarely on its end in the middle of the wreckage. Others had ranged themselves behind it. The coal spilled from them, and the débris from their wreckage was piled almost to its top. Coal rolled ceaselessly down into the cañon below; coal filled the cut and formed a rounded mound where the thirty foot gash had been; and wrecked cars poked scarred and broken ribs skyward from the mountain of débris beneath which the two men had fallen.

In Tecumseh there was grief and sadness. Blood and human flesh had been found where the brakeman jumped, but none could tell which man it was. The brakeman's wife, the fireman's sister, Carson's mother—each listened for the ring of the telephone and dreaded lest it sound.

AT THE wreck a hundred men were working. Massive cranes were swinging to and fro, breaking into the pile of débris, rocking the very foundation of the earth as they tore out wrecked coal cars and dropped them over into the cañon, while eyes watched each spot as the workers laid it bare, looked for a gruesome thing that had once been a friend.

It was broad daylight in the cañon, but in the heart of the wreckage, where Wilkerson was slowly regaining conscious, it was the pitch dark of the blackest cavern. First he could hear the faraway panting of an engine, the muffled sound of voices, mere whispers as if through thick stone walls. He felt about him—felt a hand that was not his own—wondered dreamily whose hand it was—wondered finally where he was. Gradually he recalled the events of the night—the leap from the wrecking coal train, Tommy Carson at his side. He called Carson's name. There was no answer.

He moved, groaned, dropped back upon the hard rocks. That leg—that foot; he could not move it. Slowly, without mov-

ing his body, he again began exploring, passed a hand over the body beside him—Carson's body. It was still warm. Groaning and still half conscious, he lifted himself to a sitting posture, wiped dried and drying blood from his eyes, from his face.

He felt dazedly in his pocket, found a match and, groping in the darkness, swiped it over a rock. Its flare shot rays of light about him. He perceived vaguely that he was lying in a ditch, the ditch between the track and the rock wall of the cut. Everywhere he looked he could see coal—everywhere except above him. There he saw black boards, the wall of a gondola turned upon its side and leaning against the rock wall of the cut, three feet above his head.

The match burned out. He lighted another and peered into the face of the man beside him. He started, scrambled toward the man. The yellow flare of the match, the hair towsled and matted, the face soot stained, the goggles slipped from off the nose down over the mouth like a useless gas mask, brought recognition. In that instant he recalled a night in France—a face—this same face, only then it was bending above him—the face of the man who had pulled him from the smashed truck, who had saved his life for this.

Other matches flashed, burned his fingers, and were tossed aside while he sat staring at the face. Coal moved toward the body, fine coal creeping down through crevices between the wrecked car and the rock wall of the cut, coal set in motion by the working wrecker outfit.

Tenderly he moved the body from out the path of shifting coal, only to find that from all sides coal was sifting in and closing up their retreat. He lighted other matches, crawled wearily and painfully about seeking an opening—lighted matches until only one was left. He crawled to the lower end of the opening until he reached banked coal. Here he lighted his last match and sank back with a groan.

For a long time he lay there listening to the dull sounds filtering in, listening to the coal as it crawled into their cavern. Carson groaned. Billie turned to creep toward him, dragging that crushed foot behind him.

As he moved he caught a passing gleam of light. Eagerly he drew himself toward the spot whence had come the gleam, moved coal. The ray of light grew larger. He moved other chunks of coal, kept moving coal until an opening showed above him—an opening formed of heavy timbers and twisted rods—an opening upward through the underframe of the upended coal car. On two sides powerful timbers reached as far as he could see upward. The bottom boards of the car formed the third side, and for the fourth, the truss rods of the car held back the coal as with a grating. Black coal bellied into this well-like opening. Pieces of board and twisted steel almost closed it in places, but high above him he could see the light of day.

SEE THOSE two hogheads with their tin grips coming into the Golden Spoon? Well, they've just brought in a couple of fruit trains off the west end—had a good trip in. Carson did not kick up any caution boards ahead of Wilkerson for the latter to growl about this trip. In fact, he had to wait thirty minutes down in the washroom so he could walk uptown with his bosom friend. They are both in a good humor this morning. But I would advise you, if you want the full particulars as to how Wilkerson, with his left foot smashed to a jelly, managed to work his way through the maze of tangled wreckage upward through the miraculous well formed by the bottom, the underframe sills, and the twisted truss rods of that upended Pennsylvania coal car, carrying the unconscious form of Carson and shielding it from the hail of coal which sought to bury them again, do not ask the one with the game foot. He would probably turn red and tell you to go kiss yourself. Ask Carson. For, even though he was out during the time and knew nothing about it, he is the one that can tell that tale with all the trimmings.

A Short Comic History of a Cowboy Barber

NEXT!

By HARRY G. HUSE

"AL GENTRY, that keeps the shop over in the Grand Union," said Side Hill Sowers, "used to be a cowpuncher before he was a barber.

"You go in there now and size him up, with his bowlegs hid in a pair of starched white pants and what's left of his hair parted low on the side and slicked up over the bald spot, and you'll set him down for a mild mannered little feller that ain't never handled nothing more exciting than a bottle of bay rum and a pair of Double O clippers. Watch him bobbing a lady's hair 'specially, and swallowing his tobacco juice genteel-like, and you'd never guess he was ever hell on horseback.

"Back East, I've been given to understand, a barber's a graduate of a college and has a regular diplomer. Out here it's claimed by some that the barbers all learnt their trade sheep shearing, and could do better work if, instead of having to monkey with a chair, they just ketched and throwed their customers. Al Gentry never had nothing to do with colleges or sheep either. He got his training when he was working for old man Prentice, and him and us other boys would be three, four months away from town. He was one of these little small fellers that liked things neat and tidy. Being handy with

his hands and of a helpful disposition, he used to keep everybody trimmed up and their whiskers short enough so they wouldn't tangle in the sarvis berry bushes.

"In them days long hair for men was going out of style. Kit Carson and Custer was dead, and Buffalo Bill was settled down in Nebrasky. It was generally felt that a man was putting on airs and trying to look tough when he wore his hair long enough to grease his coat collar and interfere with his hearing. There was a good bunch of quiet, hard working fellers riding that year for old man Prentice. Al, who was the best of the lot for all his banty size, had them all sheared up clean and civilized looking.

"ONE DAY there's a big, over growed feller on a hammer headed roan comes racking up and asks for a job. Claims his name's Simpson and he's just come up from Texas, riding overland, and that he's a top hand if there ever was one. He's wearing the biggest hat I ever see. Out from under it comes a regular Niagar Falls of long sandy hair. He's got one of these six inch drooping mustaches too, and a growth of dirty beard hiding his chin, and silver doodads all over his leather pants. He looks us over contemptuous.

"Don't nobody take a liking to him. Old man Prentice least of all. We got a lot of work ahead of us and the new hand sizes up as one of these big loud mouthed bullies that've got to have an audience to keep them going. But we're short handed and the old man puts him on.

"Well, outside of eating like a hog, and laying abed mornings, and being lazy and careless 'bout his work, and so dirty that nights we'll have to skirmish 'round to git him to leeward, he's unpleasant in other ways.

"He spends a lot of his time working on that hair of his'n, using Al's best brush and comb for the purpose. When he ain't admiring himself in a little hand mirror he's talking steady 'bout how good he is.

"To hear him tell it, he's the best rider and best roper and the worst man to have for an enemy in the whole State of Texas. Outside of being a crack pistol shot and cool headed in a jam, the thing that makes him so feared, he claims, is his bull strength. He weighs two hunderd twenty pounds and all muscle, he says. Before he got the big hammer headed roan, he used to ride just ordinary cow ponies. But he was always forgetting himself, and squeezing too hard with his legs and caving their ribs in.

"If we hadn't been so busy and everybody tired when they come in at night, we'd of took holt of him and calmed him down a little. There was plenty of fellers in the crowd was pretty good theirselves—if they'd cared to talk about it. But we let him go, and mostly acted like we didn't see or hear him.

"Things would of worked out all right that way if he hadn't been one of these fellers that always had to be picking on some one. When he see we don't pay no attention to him it gits under his hide, and he commences to git mean and nasty. He picks out Al Gentry, him being so small and close mouthed and clean looking, and starts making fun of him. Calls him Bub like you would a youngun, and wants to know where he's left his Shetland pony, and what he's aiming to be when he grows up.

"Al lets it go for a couple of days. Then one noon when we've all et and are setting around smoking, he digs around in his blanket roll and brings out the little suitcase he keeps his barber tools in, and an old Bible.

"The big feller's watching everything he does. He gives a whoop when he sees the Bible. 'Hey, Bub,' he says, 'going to study your Sunday School lesson?'

"Al turns the pages of the book and don't even glance up at the big feller.

"'I'm looking up something,' he says polite, and goes on hunting.

"He finds his place, and seems like he's reading a couple of pages. Texas is setting on an empty box, watching him, and making remarks of one kind and another.

"Al finishes his reading and nods his head. 'I thought I was right,' he says, 'but I wanted to be certain.'

"Al swings 'round like he was going to put the Bible back in his bed roll. He picks up his loop that he's got laid out there on the ground behind him. He turns back sudden and flips it. Bang! comes the big feller down off his box. Al's all over him while he's still sprawling. Texas is hogtied and helpless before he can even git his mouth open.

"AL WORKS slow and careful after that. He gits out two-three pairs of clippers and tries them on his arm to see which pair cuts clostest. Then he straddles the big boy and starts at his neck and works right up.

"Texas bucks some there at the beginning. If the little feller hadn't had his spurs on Texas might of throwed him. He calms down sudden for such a big ferocious feller. Al sits him tight and inside ten minutes he's got Texas smooth as any billard ball.

"Al gits off and stands back to look his job over. He holds his head first one side then the other like he's real satisfied. He sure ain't improved the big feller's looks none. His head's shaped like an egg, and now that his whiskers's gone there's not much chin to speak of.

"Al gits a little brush he's got and dusts off the loose hair. He takes out his knife and goes to cut the rope he's got the feller tied with.

" 'Take it easy, Al,' says the old man, who's been laughing with the rest of us but has now got sober. 'Take it easy. The feller's mad and you better take his gun before you turn him loose.'

" 'Hell, Boss,' says Al. 'He's harmless now. I looked it up there in the Bible.' He cuts the ropes and Texas gits up slow and painful to his feet.

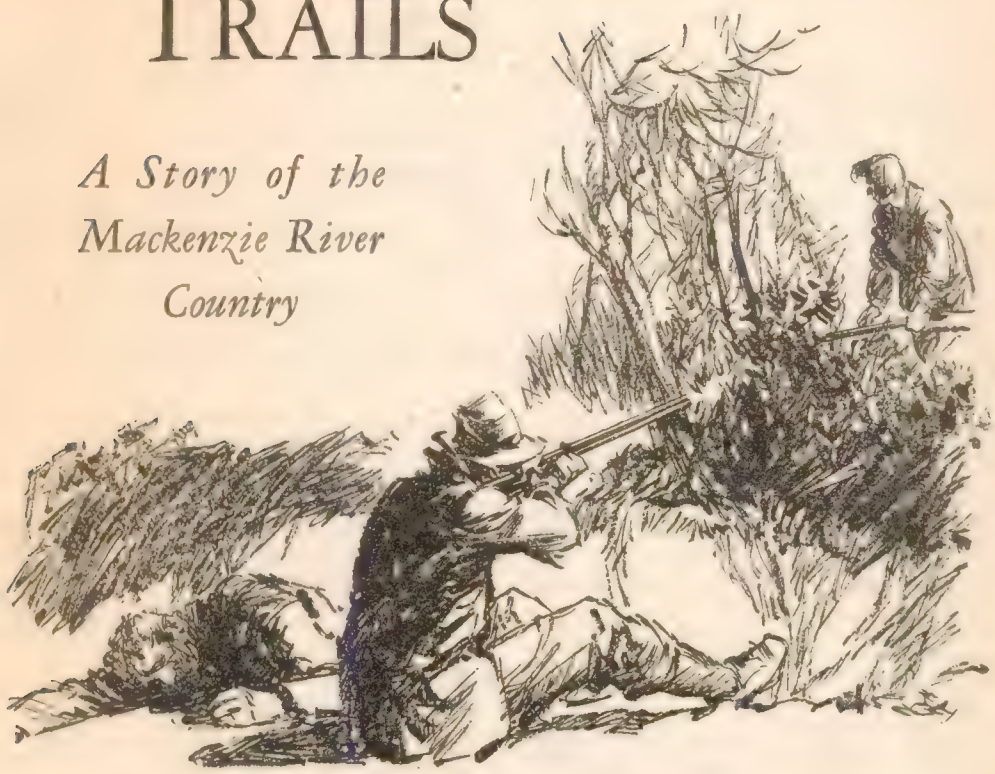
" 'Bible?' says the old man, 'Bible? What's the Bible got to do with Simpson?'

" 'Simpson nothing,' says Al. 'You got him down wrong on the payroll. This big boy's name is Samson!' "

Beyond TRAILS

By
JOHN BEAMES

A Story of the Mackenzie River Country



THE man sat in a little depression in the midst of a clump of willows. His shoulders drooped, and his head hung forward on his chest as though he had been suddenly overcome by sleep.

Happy Checquers said—

"Hello."

The man started violently and turned toward him a face of terror and despair.

"Are you one of them?" he asked hoarsely.

"One of who?" inquired Happy. "I'm the only one I know of around here."

"One of Conlin's gang."

"Conlin? Never heard of him. Friend of yours?"

The man showed his teeth like a trapped animal at bay.

"Don't joke with me. Here's my poke, but I won't tell you where the rest is. I'll die first. Shoot if you want to, I don't care. But I won't tell you."

He dragged from his ragged clothing a greasy leather poke and held it out with a trembling hand.

"See here," said Happy gently, gazing sympathetically into the haggard face with its fringe of tangled beard. "You're excited about something. I'm not holdin' you up. You can keep your poke an' you don't need to tell me nothin' you don't want to. You look to be in some kind of a jam. Maybe I can help you."

He sat down before the man, examining him with keen, withal pitying eyes. The stranger's clothes were mere tatters and his feet bundles of blanket strips. His

left shoulder was clumsily bound in a rag stained black with dried blood. Hunger and fear and exhaustion were in his bloodless hollow cheeks and restless glittering eyes. He smelt like a caged bear.

"Where'd you come from?" he asked suspiciously.

Happy waved a hand to the westward, where the fangs of the Cassiar Range just peeped above the forested foothills.

"Back there," he said. "Had a streak of hard luck. Me an' Tommy Neate and old Doug McNab—prospectin'. Left 'em in the valley one mornin' an' went up the mountain. Been some heavy rain an' more comin' up. Got caught in a storm an' denned up for the night in a little cave. Thunder, lightnin' an' hail— All hell let loose. In the mornin' comes the worst racket of the lot. About half the mountain comes loose below me an' down into the valley, slap on top of the camp. Everything buried—pack ponies, tent, my two partners. The best pair of damn' good scouts—"

Happy broke off. His loss was too recent and his grief too deep for casual speech. Tears came into his eyes. He ground his teeth and shook his head angrily.

"Nothin' to do," he went on when he had controlled his emotion. "Just had what I stood up in, the whole valley full of mud an' rocks. Nothin' to do but come away. So I took an' followed down the river, figurin' to hit the Mackenzie. Just pickin' a place to camp for the night when I seen you here."

As the stranger listened the suspicion in his eyes lessened. He took his gaze from Happy's face and peered restlessly out through the screening leaves.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"They call me Happy Checquers, though my right name's Martin."

"My name's Ben Myner. Say, does that look like a man to you?"

Happy followed the finger with his eyes, and shook his head.

"Dead stump."

"Oh, well, they'll come yet," said Myner in a voice of resigned despair. "They'll get me, but they won't get the gold. That's buried where nobody'll never find it. I can't go no further. If I could kill Conlin before I die I wouldn't kick, but I'll never tell where the gold is."

"See here," said Happy. "I ain't tryin' to butt in on your business, but I don't savvy your talk. You look to me pretty hard put to it. I got a little grub here I was savin' up, but you're welcome to it."

Myner made a face of disgust.

"I was hungry," he admitted wearily, "but I ain't no more. I don't know when I eat last."

Happy shook his head.

"A feller don't want to talk that way. Wait. I'll get a fire an' cook you up some grub."

"Don't you light a fire, don't you light a fire," cried Myner. "Want to bring Conlin right down on us? I tell you, he's lookin' for me. He don't know where I am right now, but he's on my trail. He'll find me. Belarmee'll follow a trail like a hound."

Happy was puzzled and curious. He could not decide whether Myner's evident alarm was due to some actual peril, or was merely one of those baseless terrors with which the northern wilderness afflicts those who fall into its power. Men have often been found crazed and starving, pursued by imaginary enemies through that lonely land.

FOOD is the best medicine in such cases. Without a regret, Happy opened his pack and extracted therefrom a small, greasy piece of salt pork—more precious than gold in that region—and cut off a thin slice.

"Suck on that," he said. "Likely it'll cheer you up."

A greedy look came into Myner's wandering eyes. He snatched the meat with a clawlike hand and crammed it into his mouth. Then he choked.

"Easy," cautioned Happy. "Easy now. Just suck on it."

"Give me some more," clamored Myner

hoarsely. "I'm starvin'. Give me—Damn you, can't you see I'm dyin' of hunger?" Weak tears trickled down the hair on his sunken cheeks.

"I'll give you a little," said Happy. "Not much at a time. It'll only make you sick. Now suck on this. Don't wolf it."

"Can't I have some more?" pleaded Myner. "Just a little bit."

"No, lay down an' sleep now. I'll have some more for you when you wake up."

"Don't light a fire," entreated Myner. "You don't know. I ain't made a fire, nor I ain't hardly slept for days an' days. I been scared to. Belarmee's follerin' up my trail."

"Lay down an' go to sleep," soothed Happy. "I'll watch out."

He covered the recumbent man with his own blanket, for the season was nearing autumn, and in the north it is never really warm out of the sun. Myner slept uneasily, twitching and muttering incoherently, his drawn face looking ghastly under the shifting play of light and shadow caused by the willow leaves dancing in the wind.

As soon as he was assured that the man slept, Happy laid a fire, choosing, however, only small dry sticks for fuel. Over it he cooked two small strips of salt pork and made a tiny bannock from the half pound or so of flour that remained in his sack. He ate the meat and a small portion of the bannock, saving the remainder for Myner when he awoke.

He had been tramping hard all day on insufficient food, and, darkness now beginning to fall, he lay down beside Myner and pulled part of the blanket over himself. In a few moments he was in a sound sleep.

He was suddenly awakened by a gasping cry.

"Let go! Let go! Let go!"

He sat up with a start. Dawn was coming, and in the dim light he made out Myner crouching under a bush with a rifle in his hands, glaring at him.

"What in hell's the matter with you?" he demanded in justifiable irritation.

Myner let the rifle fall.

"I'm sorry," he said contritely. "I dreamt they'd got me."

"All right," said Happy affably. "It's time to roll out anyway. Here, chew on this bannock. Sorry there ain't no more, but my flour's done."

"You eat some," said Myner, though his famished eyes fastened avidly on the yellow slab.

"No, no. I had plenty before I lay down," lied Happy. "Go on, down her. We'll get plenty more pretty soon."

"Yes, if Conlin don't catch us," said Myner gloomily, his mouth full of bannock. "I'll tell you, stranger, you been damn' good to me, but you take my advice an' keep right on goin'. You can't help me, an' if Conlin's gang finds me an' you together it'll be good night for you, too."

Happy's face lost its cheerful lines and something hard rose up behind the firm round cheeks and chubby chin.

"I don't hustle worth a cent," he said in a cold voice. "This Conlin guy might find it out if he tries to jump me. What's it all about anyway?"

"I'll tell you," said Myner in a burst of confidence. "You been good to me. I guess you're square. I'll tell you. This is how it was."

He paused and passed a hand weakly over his face.

"I just don't remember the straight of it—whether Conlin was married to Dick's sister, or his brother was, or how; but he claimed that brought him in on it. Not that Dick had much use for him no way."

"An' who was Dick?" asked Happy.

"Dick? Why, Dick Howe. Didn't you know Dick? He was my pardner. Yes, sir, he was my friend. An' Conlin killed him. Shot him when he lay down by the creek to take a drink. He fell on his face in the water. I went to pull him out, but he was gone, an' the bullets all around me. I had to run for it, an' them shootin' at me all that day. I shot back, but I was runnin' out of shells an' I couldn't hold 'em. I been runnin' ever since, all through the mountains, day an' night. All across the mountains. Nothin' to eat hardly,

dassent sleep, an' them after me. I'm done now. I can't go no more. But they won't never get the gold. That's safe anyway."

"I don't get you," said Happy gently. "Why were they after you?"

"Don't be a damn' fool," said Myner irritably. "Account of the gold, of course. Six hundred ounces as near as we could figure it, dust an' nuggets. It got too heavy after Dick hurt his foot. We couldn't carry it no further. Had to bury it."

He shot a quick glance of suspicion at Happy.

"I won't tell you where. You'd tell Conlin."

"I don't want to know where," answered Happy patiently. "But I'd like to know the how of it. You an' your pardner was workin' a placer west of the mountains, eh? An' this Conlin butted in on you?"

Myner nodded.

"Staked claims down the creek an' didn't make wages. We had it all. So, when they begun to look ugly, me an' Dick took our dust an' pulled out after dark, figurin' to cross the mountains an' come down to the Mackenzie. Thought it'd be quicker than hittin' for Dawson or White Horse. An' they after us."

"How many?"

"Five of 'em. Herby Conlin, Small, an' Chuck Skeat, white men. An' that big, dirty breed bum, Belarmee—Lou Belarmee, an' Job Wheat, mulatto, I guess—coon blood in him anyway. But I got Job."

MYNER looked up with a savage gleam in his eyes and a grin that made his teeth flash through the ragged hair round his mouth.

"I got him before he seen me. That was after Dick was killed. I crep' up on him. I got him, but he give me this before he died."

He pulled back the foul rag from his shoulder and showed a deep bullet graze, swollen and inflamed.

"Hm, that leaves two against four," said Happy. "Not so bad."

Myner shook his head pessimistically.

"I can't raise my left arm. Only that high. Got to shoot from the hip. All right if I can get clost enough, but no good no other way. No, you better keep goin', stranger. It ain't right to bring you in on this. I'm feelin' stronger now I had some sleep an' grub. I'll just lay quiet here till they find me an' maybe I can get one of 'em before I pass out. I wouldn't care if I could get a crack at Conlin. It was him shot Dick."

"No," said Happy with decision. "You come along with me. I'm lonesome an' I need company. If we follow the river down we'd ought to strike the Mackenzie. We're well out of the mountains, an' it can't be so far now. We'd ought to be in the wood-buffalo country now, an' if I can get a shot at one of 'em we'll be well fixed for grub."

Myner refused to be cheered.

"You better keep on goin'," he repeated stubbornly. "As long as they don't get the gold, I don't care. Just so as I get a chance at Conlin before I pass out, I'm satisfied."

"How do you know they're still after you?" asked Happy. "When did you see 'em last?"

Myner contracted his forehead in an effort to remember.

"Two, no . . ." He began to count on his fingers.

"It was three days after we left camp we decided to cache the gold. That was after Dick hurt his foot. It was the mornin' after the next day, comin' daylight, they shot Dick. That makes four, no, five days. Sun down the same day, up in the pass, I got Job. Six, eh?"

"Five, if it was the same day," said Happy.

"You put me out," grumbled Myner. "Maybe it wasn't the same day. Well, say, five days. After that I was six, maybe seven more days in the mountains. Damn' cold, rain, snow sometimes. No trail—goin' up an' down, up an' down, an' them after me. My shoulder sore as

hell. They thought they had me once, but I clumb down the rock—in the dark, black an' stormin' like the devil—sore shoulder an' all. I fell the last of the way an' near killed myself. Lost my pack, all my grub an' my blanket. Couldn't find 'em in the dark an' rain. That'd be three four— Oh, hell, I don't know how long ago."

"You haven't seen any of 'em since?"

"Yes; sure I seen 'em. I seen Belarmee. I was layin' in the bush an' he went by a hundred feet away. If I could have held my gun still I'd have shot him. But my hand shook. An' anyway, it was Conlin I wanted."

"When was that?"

Myner's eyes were blank.

"Was it yesterday, or maybe the day before? I don't know. How the hell should I know? But they're lookin' for me. They dassent let me go now. They know I'll tell on 'em about Dick. An' they'll kill you too if they catch you. You're strong, you can travel. Go on down to the Mackenzie an' tell the first mountie you come to. I can't travel no more. When I struck this here river yesterday afternoon, I figured I wouldn't go no further. I got water here anyway, an' maybe I can live till you get back."

"You're comin' right along with me," said Happy firmly. "I can't leave you here. Come on, you're a lot stronger than you think you are."

He put his arm around Myner and helped him to his feet. Hunger had not yet sapped his own strength dangerously, though his round face was beginning to look worn, and his tanned skin was turning yellow.

"We can't travel by daylight; they'll see us sure," objected Myner.

"Not if we watch out," said Happy, still a little skeptical and inclined to believe that Myner had given his murderous pursuers the slip.

They advanced slowly, Myner moving with an uncertain step and searching with restless and apprehensive eyes every vista that opened to their gaze.

IT WAS a rough country. On one side a turbid yellow stream foamed and eddied between steep, crumbling banks of clay and gravel; on the other, a belt of tangled forest clothed the lower slopes of bald, broken hills, divided by deep and heavily wooded ravines. Across the river stretched an unbroken line of jackpine forest, undulating and monotonous. Vision was confined to succeeding reaches of the tortuous river and the tops of distant hills.

"They'll have a sweet job findin' us here," said Happy optimistically.

"Not if they follow down the river," answered Myner gloomily, staring back over his shoulder. "There, did you see somethin' move?"

"You're seein' things," laughed Happy. "It's just a whiskey-jack or maybe a jay. No, see, it's just a old black crow."

A little farther on a red squirrel burst into shrill chattering in the depth of the thicket.

"Somethin' scared him," whispered Myner, clutching at Happy's arm. "Lay down. I bet they're right in there." He was quivering like a leaf.

"All right, all right. We'll set down an' take a little rest," agreed Happy patiently. "Them squirrels is always gettin' het up about somethin'."

"There he is again," burst out Myner. "Oh, my God, they're comin'! There they are. Look!"

He dragged Happy down beside him, flat in the long grass.

Four men emerged from the bush upon the river bank before them, a hundred yards away.

"That's Conlin," whispered Myner. "That short stout guy in the brown shirt. That's Belarmee, I know him by his sash. Small's the big man, an' the other feller's Skeat."

"Well, we got the drop on 'em," returned Happy cheerfully. "I don't guess they'll do us much harm."

"But I can't hold my gun to shoot—only from the hip," objected Myner fretfully. "An' they're down river from us. How'll we get by now?"

"Well, we know where they are, but they don't know where we are," said Happy. "That's somethin'. We can't be so awful far from the Mackenzie an' all we got to do is keep goin' east. How if we hit into the hills? We'll find water enough to get by on."

Myner groaned.

"I don't know. I guess I'm done. I got no heart in me. You better go on an' leave me. They don't know you seen me an' if you meet up with 'em you can tell 'em you ain't. They'll let you go by, an' maybe you can get to a police post an' come back for me, though I don't guess I'll be alive that long."

"Quit talkin' that way," said Happy. "I'm seein' you through on this."

He was watching Myner's pursuers. They had been examining the river bank, apparently for tracks, and now seemed undecided what to do. The tall man with a gaudy sash round his waist, whom Myner had pointed out as Balarmee, began to walk in the direction of their hiding place.

Happy lowered his head and the hammer of his rifle clicked softly under his thumb. Balarmee continued to advance, casting keen glances at the ground and on either side. The muzzle of Happy's rifle pointed straight at his chest. He was now not thirty paces distant.

"I'll give you till you see us," muttered Happy, his finger crooked on the trigger.

Then there was a hail from the rear. The breed turned his head, but took another step forward. The hail being repeated in imperative tones by Conlin, he turned slowly and slouched back.

"Pretty near a funeral that trip," murmured Happy, but little beads of sweat glistened on his forehead.

The four passed down the river together and out of sight.

"Well, they're away anyhow," said Happy. "Let's hope they keep on goin'. I know what I'm goin' to do. I'm goin' to light a fire an' cook up the balance of this sowbelly. If we get one good meal into us we'll be better fixed to tough it."

"But they'll see the smoke."

"Can't see smoke very far on a day like this—not if you use good dry wood. Come on back in the bush where the smoke'll spread goin' up through the leaves."

Myner grunted apathetically, but followed. The sight of the scanty strips of salt pork sizzling over the flames re-awoke his hunger. Divided equally, the pork did not make a big meal, but the two men felt the better for it.

PEOPLE who knew Happy had learned that he was a man difficult to disturb, impossible to hurry, but extraordinarily resourceful and tenacious in getting his own way. Myner's wild story was evidently substantially true, and Happy was no longer inclined to minimize the difficulties and dangers confronting him. To abandon Myner would probably insure his own safety, but without food, even if he were not discovered by his enemies, the man would not live many days longer.

To remain where they were, in the hope that Conlin and his gang would leave the neighborhood, was an impossibility, for both would then starve. The only possible course was to leave the river, and in some manner coax or drag Myner over unknown country an unknown distance to the Mackenzie. Happy confessed to himself that the outlook was not brilliant with promise, but his smiling face betrayed no disquietude when he turned it upon Myner, lying stretched full length on the ground, the picture of weariness and defeat.

"We'll beat 'em out yet," he said. "You trimmed 'em this far, an' with me to help you we'll get through a-shootin'."

"No, I'm done," said Myner sulkily. "You go on without me. Wait now, an' I'll tell you where the gold is, as near as I can remember. You been damn' good to me, an' I don't mind you gettin' it."

"Kind of hard guy to handle, ain't you?" asked Happy with a quizzical grin. "Didn't I tell you once to quit talkin' that way? If you want to let me in on the gold when we come through, that's up to you, I ain't worryin'. What we got to

think about now is how we'll get out of this jam. So get in the collar, old horse, an' we'll hit her with a smile."

Myner looked up at him gratefully.

"You're a good gent," he said, and tried to rise.

"That's the boy," said Happy, holding out a helping hand. "Here, lean on this stick. Leave me carry your rifle. Who says you can't travel?"

But despite his cheerful assurances their progress was painfully slow. Myner's emaciated face turned gray and he breathed in whistling gasps between clenched teeth.

They left the river, intending to strike into the hills, but soon found their way barred by a swamp. This had to be skirted through a tangled maze of willows. The need of remaining under cover and of moving quietly added to their difficulties.

No sign of their enemies appeared, but in the thickets that extended to the very brink of the river, a dozen parties might easily roam for hours without encountering each other.

At the end of two hours they found themselves faced by a deep ravine, down which raced a swift little river. Here was the first open space they had seen, a triangular patch of long grass, bounded on one side by the swamp flowing into the ravine through a boggy trough, on the second by the ravine itself, and on the third by the bush from which they had just emerged.

At the apex of the triangle, where the ground broke steeply away towards the little river, Myner sank down with a groan.

"I can't make it," he said. "I couldn't get across that creek nor through the muskeg. My legs got no strength left in 'em."

Happy looked at him in deep discouragement. Myner did indeed seem on the verge of death. But there was no help for it. While he lived he must be urged forward. He could not be left and Happy could not carry him.

"You set down here an' rest," he said. "I'm goin' down the creek an' see can we get across anywheres between here an' the river. I'll be back soon as I can."

"You ain't goin' to leave me?" quavered Myner. "I know I told you to go, but I didn't mean it. It's awful to have to die alone."

"Don't fret," answered Happy smilingly. "I'll be back before you know. Just lay down an' rest. Get under this here bush. There—now a feller could pretty near step on you an' he'd not see you if you didn't move. I won't be long."

HE STIFLED a sigh as he walked away. To be parted from the helpless man, even for a little while, was like a load lifted from his shoulders. He was subjecting himself to extreme peril, starvation, yet he was bound by the honor of the North—a stern and beautiful code—to succor the sick and endangered at whatever cost. He smiled ruefully to think that if he had not peered into a particular clump of willows in search of firewood, he would have passed Myner by and have been far on his way by now.

But the reflection did not shake his purpose in the least.

He found as he proceeded that the ravine widened as it neared the river, and he came presently to a place where the course of the stream was broken by a bar of loose boulders. He managed to cross with little difficulty, and a little further exploration convinced him that it was the only practicable crossing for a man in Myner's condition.

At the same time he scanned the banks above with an anxious eye. Conlin and his associates might set a guard upon the spot if they discovered it. But some small birds were twittering and flitting from bush to bush at the top of the slope in a way to convince Happy no one was lurking there.

He was retracing his steps when he heard a single shot from in front. It was answered by another at some distance, and a third from yet another quarter.

"They've found him," was the thought that flashed into his mind. "One of 'em's seen him and signaled the rest."

He began to run, clutching at the bushes that clung to the stiff clay, stumbling and slipping on the steep slope, but rising again and pressing on.

He came into sight of the bare point where he had left Myner. He saw Myner upon his knees, supporting himself with his rifle, with his free hand lifted in supplication to some unseen person on the level ground beyond.

The answer to the pitiful gesture of surrender was a shot. Myner swayed, toppled backwards over the edge and went rolling down to the water's edge.

Happy was normally of a peculiarly calm and equable nature, but the sight of the cold blooded murder moved him to a blazing anger. He forgot his own peril and the odds against him, and dashed forward, growling curses deep in his throat.

Then he halted abruptly and the mist of blind rage cleared from his brain. The four murderers had appeared on the lip of the ravine and were gazing down at Myner.

The man was not dead, for he made feeble efforts to drag himself out of the water in which he was immersed to the hips.

One of the men lifted a rifle, but another struck it up, and there seemed to be some altercation among them. Happy seized the moment to slip under the cover afforded him by a sweeping willow. This brought him within sixty yards of the group.

The opportunity was favorable for a shot, but to his first impulse of unreasoning anger had succeeded a clear headed appraisal of the situation. His position was bad. His enemies had all the advantage of the ground, and his cover was pitifully inadequate. Once seen, he could neither advance nor retreat in safety, and his flank could easily be turned by men moving freely on the level surface above, out of range.

The single point in his favor was that his presence was unknown and unsuspected, and his only hope lay in the utilization of that advantage.

The dispute among the murderers had ended by two of them beginning to descend the bank, the other pair looking on. Happy took advantage of their preoccupation to make a retrograde movement on his stomach that took him behind an outlying clay buttress, enabling him to gain the plateau unseen.

This brought him to a point a little to the right rear of the two men remaining on level ground. He recognized one of them by his sash as Belarmee the breed. The other man, partly hidden by Belarmee, seemed to be Conlin.

Happy cocked his rifle and ran forward, but some subtle sense warned the breed of danger and he swung his head.

The opportunity for a surprise had passed, but for the moment Conlin's fire was blocked by Belarmee, and the other two were out of sight. Happy flung up his rifle, took cool aim, and fired.

The bullet passed right through Belarmee's body and struck Conlin. The 'breed dropped to his hands and knees, swayed with hanging head, and rolled over on his side. Conlin flung up his arms with a sharp cry and seemed to leap into the ravine.

IN FIVE seconds Happy had reached the ravine and was staring down into the startled faces of Small and Skeat.

"Put up your hands or you're dead men," he ordered sternly.

Their rifles dropped to the ground and slid away down the slope as they obeyed.

"My God," gasped Happy. "Stop him."

Conlin, in his involuntary plunge down the slope, had landed almost on top of Myner, blood spurting from a severed femoral artery.

The sight of his foe seemed to endow Myner with supernatural energy. He lifted himself out of the water and flung himself upon Conlin.

"You killed Dick Howe," he screamed in a shrill, broken voice. "You shot me when I put my hands up."

The fingers of his right hand were buried deep in Conlin's throat, and he pressed him down into the mud at the edge of the stream with all his weight.

It was all that Skeat and Small could do to tear him from his hold, but once that was done he collapsed in their arms.

"Bring him up here," ordered Happy.

They dragged the limp body up the slope and laid it down.

"Now go an' bring the other feller," directed Happy. "An' take an' kick your guns into the creek. I'll be watchin' you."

They brought up Conlin, but his eyes were already glazing. Belarmee's wound also was mortal and it was evident he would not live long.

But on Myner, strangely enough, no fresh wound appeared. The mystery was explained when he opened his eyes.

After he had been propped up to see for himself that Conlin was dead, he said:

"It ain't no fault of his I ain't dead too. When he shot at me I was leanin' on my rifle, an' the bullet hit it some place and knocked it out of my hand. I lost my balance an' went over, me bein' so weak."

"Well, if there's any grub around we'll have somethin' to eat now," decided Happy. "An' then these two stout lads is goin' to make a stretcher for you out of blankets an' tote you down to the Mackenzie."

He turned upon the sulky and disconsolate survivors a smile that was not to be trifled with.

"I'm easy to live with if I'm used right," he said. "But I can be a hard nut when I'm stepped on. Watch where you put your feet."

THE ARAB POLICEMAN

By

H*arry* A. F*ranck*

SOMEWHERE in my rambling about the barge that accommodated third class passengers on the journey up the Nile, I had lost my landing ticket. Legally, such mishap required me to pay the fare—a sum far larger than I possessed—a second time. As it was I anticipated trouble and hubbub at Wady Halfa; an anticipation in no wise unfulfilled.

For months past, both in Palestine and Egypt, I, being a Frank, had enjoyed immunity from interference by native officers. The Soudan, however, under the joint protection of England and Egypt—or, in plain language, British territory—enjoys all the rights and privileges of the most favored nations, among which is the permission to take into custody any human being under the sun. Yet, knowing even this fact, it was with something of a shock that I felt myself in the grasp of three black Nubians, as the result of an attempt to force my way up the gangway unticketed.

With all his training under British rule, however, the African is still much the child that nature made him. His habitual notion that the white man is made to command rather than to be commanded is not easily effaced. A push and a shove freed me of the policemen and, instead of laying hands on me again, they merely followed me up the bank, pouring forth three utterly indistinguishable streams of Arabic, in the tone of street gamins who have been despoiled of their marbles. At the top of the bank a veritable army of natives, of every class and degree, imbued with the Oriental weakness for joining in any dispute, were racing riverward, and we were incontinently surrounded by all Wady Halfa, and his wife and offspring.

As I advanced towards the town the multitude fell back before me, always just beyond reach, as if convinced that I was gifted with some power to annihilate life at the slightest contact. The policemen walked at my heels, increasing their triplet bellow at every step. The only words I could distinguish in the chaos of conflicting sound waves was the oft-repeated Arabic version of "You are under arrest!" A very confining hardship, indeed, was this being in durance vile in the Soudan.

At the corner of the village market two of the officers dived headlong into the throng and, after being severely buffeted by the neck craning rabble, gained terra firma and set off at a run in opposite directions. Evidently they had gone for reinforcements. The third stuck grimly to his post, to wit, my heels, and strained valiantly to continue, single tongued, the original volume of uproar.

Free agent as I was, however, it soon became evident that I was drawing Wady Halfians away from their several occupations. Moreover, the rabble that attended me was sweeping through the market like a tidal wave, wrecking shop-front displays as we passed and leaving a line of wailing merchants in our wake. Such conduct was unseemly. I halted to make a proposition to the remaining policeman. His utterances had acquired a momentum which was not easily overcome and he had by no means fallen silent, when his two comrades returned with an

auxiliary force of half a dozen recruits, quite plainly suffering the acute horrors of stage fright.

I sat down in the nearest shop front and, as silence approached, made my proposition. I would conduct myself as a self-respecting prisoner should, providing the officer nearest at hand accompanied me alone and sent his fellows to disperse the mob. A long, eloquent parley ensued. Then the squad of eight fell fiercely upon their fellow countrymen and drove them pell-mell in all directions. The survivor, swollen with a sense of his temporary importance, grasped my arm and pointed down the street. I refused to move until he released me. He burst forth in a new flow of eloquence, but acquiesced at last and we set off side by side.

It was quite apparent that the fleeting authority over a "faranchee" was an event that would be related to his children's children. His fez sat at a rakish tilt on his close shaven head, his chest filled his khaki jacket to its utmost capacity, the massive shoes at the ends of his puttee wound pipe stems struck the earth with weighty resolution at every step.

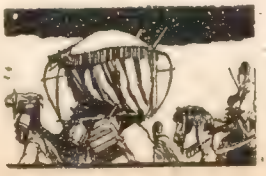
But his innate garrulousness was not abated. In the half mile walk to the fortress he was accosted a score of times by some wide eyed victim of curiosity and, though the inquirer was but a shirtless urchin, he halted to give him a full and detailed account of my misdemeanor. Fancy a New York policeman stopping at the cry of every newsboy he met between the scene of crime and the station, to relate with beaming countenance and histrionic gestures the story of the capture, and then trotting away to catch up with his prisoner! If you can do so, the inherent dignity of the Soudanese officer is clearly visualized.

At the fort our arrival caused great excitement. A native lieutenant tumbled down the outside barrack stairs, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, and pushed his way into the circle of privates that had surrounded me. It was plain that the excited tirade of my captor left the lieutenant uncertain whether I had shot the mudir or merely blown up the government offices.

However, he ordered me to follow him to a cell at once. I politely declined to obey until I was assured that breakfast would be provided without delay, for the day was waxing late and I had risen with the dawn. The lieutenant stared at me, open mouthed. I still persisted. He resorted to all the Soudanese powers of persuasion; he commanded, wheedled, implored. His shouts were echoed by the soldiers swarming about us.

When I still remained obdurate, he urged them on until their bellows became a continuous roar. He even pointed to the muskets in the hands of some of the garrison, and commanded anew. When even this menace failed, he turned away in disgust and, waving his hands above his head in a gesture of helplessness, slowly climbed the stone stairway to his quarters. The self-complacent smile of my captor had turned to a grimace that threatened tears. I turned toward the gate. He followed a few paces, glanced over his shoulder at the lieutenant's quarters, and stopped, undecided.

I strolled nonchalantly away into the village.



CUMSHAW

A Novel of the China Seas

By CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE

CHAPTER I

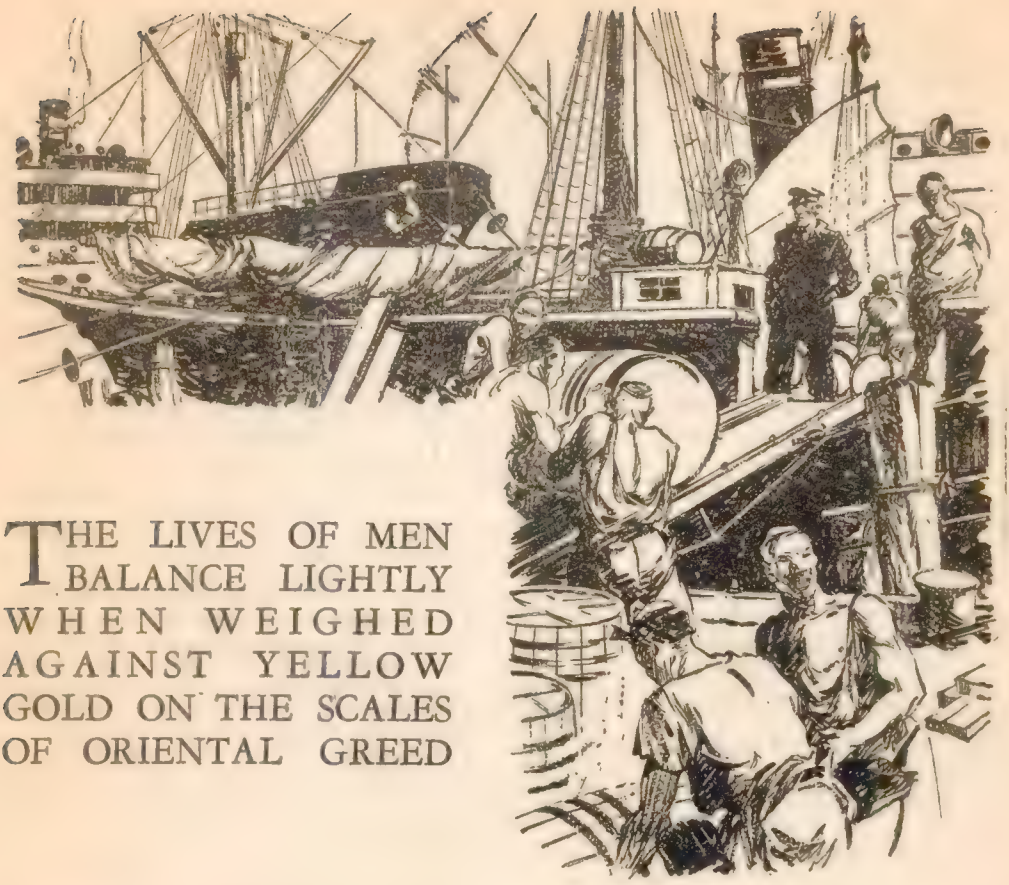
THE MAN WHO SAW

IT WAS a little after the regular *tiffin* hour at the Café of Ten Thousand Sublime Hopes when extraordinary events disturbed the fragrant and restful atmosphere of the ornate and luxurious restaurant. The resort of wealthy Chinese engaged in commerce, and favored by many white men who did business with Chinese, the place was quiet and cool, with heavy matted awnings that swung over the canal. Most of the guests arrived in their own launches by the wide waterway, which was under the windows on one side, and which opened to the harbor mouth a mile or more below the city.

On the canal side, under the awnings, the Chinese sat at small teak topped tables and plied their chopsticks or sipped their sherbets while they finished pending contracts; and in booths on the other side, shielded by curtains or elaborate screens, white men discussed business. There was nothing on this particular afternoon that gave promise of anything extraordinary, yet one thing happened after the other with amazing suddenness—and without warning.

A young man, dressed in a pongee suit, his sun helmet on the table beyond his glass of mineral water, looked across the room with a swift turn of his head and then sprang from his chair in a wild leap toward a young Chinese, four tables beyond.

The Chinese leaped in a panic from his



THE LIVES OF MEN BALANCE LIGHTLY WHEN WEIGHED AGAINST YELLOW GOLD ON THE SCALES OF ORIENTAL GREED

table and, tipping over his bowl of sherbet, dashed past the outer tables that barred the way to the launch landing under the awnings, clambered swiftly over the railing and leaped out upon the matted roofs of nearby lorchas moving slowly down the canal. From boat to boat he sped, and after he had disappeared from view in a long tier of lighters, a launch shot into view, and with its propeller racing, shot down the canal at terrific speed.

The young man, who had attempted to capture the Chinese before he got clear of the railing, turned and ran swiftly back past his table. He did not stop there, but darted behind a tall screen, thrust aside the hangings of a private booth and burst into a small room.

A white man, clad in spotless duck, turned and looked in amazement. In his right hand he had a glass of wine and was just about to put it to his lips.

"What are you—"

Before he could finish the question, the young man swung forward with his fist and knocked the wine glass from the lifted hand of the older man. The glass crashed against the wall, and the wine fell in a purple shower upon white duck coat and the tablecloth, while bits of shattered glass tinkled to table and matted floor.

Bewildered and resentful, not yet able to grasp the motive for the strange attack, the older man simply rose to his feet and stared.

The young man bowed.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, "but I had to make sure you didn't drink that wine."

"I like your nerve!" exclaimed the other angrily. "Do you make a practise of going around—rushing into private rooms —and knocking—"

Quong Loo, the stout proprietor of the Café of Ten Thousand Sublime Hopes, came bustling into the place. In his lavender breeches and lilac jacket, and his black skullcap with its button on top, he resembled a colorful and bulbous plant which had just burst into blossom. And behind him pressed a trio of blue jacketed assistants, their faces immobile but grave. Outside other guests were asking questions in excited tones; English and Chinese mingled.

The sound of the ancient battered gong swiftly revealed that the police were being summoned.

"What you do this side?" demanded Quong.

He nodded his head forward as if beginning a bow and then checked the motion. After all, he was dealing with white men.

The young man did not reply to the question. He gave no notice of the arrival of the Chinese, but continued to face the wine spattered guest.

"You must think I'm crazy, sir—but I saw something which alarmed me. Tell them not to bring the police in here, if I may suggest it—and I'll explain—privately." He took a card from his pocket and put it on the table.

The other picked up the card and read the name.

"Anthony Kenton," he said. "You're an American, eh?" He scanned the face of the young man. Then he turned his eyes upon the proprietor. "It's all right, Quong Loo. No damage done, really. I'll have a few words with this gentleman alone. And don't bother us with the police—nothing wrong—just hush things up."

Quong Loo, relieved, bent in a deep bow and waved his assistants away. Then he hurried out himself and began calling orders in a shrill voice, and presently he was laughing and explaining to the puzzled guests about the tables.

THE ELDER man drew the heavy damask curtains of the tiny room and turned to the intruder.

"I'm giving you a chance to explain," he said curtly, "but you'll be as quick as possible. I'm expecting a business associate here in the next five or ten minutes. And don't speak so you can be heard outside, if it's all the same to you."

He gestured to the chair on the opposite side of the table, but Anthony Kenton did not sit down.

"I can tell you the whole thing in a few words, sir. That wine you were about to drink—it was on a tray which your waiter set down for a couple of seconds at a table not far from where I sat. I happened to be looking that way. And I saw a young Chinese pour something into your glass."

The face of the older man lost some of its color. He gulped in a peculiar manner.

"Something—in the glass!" he repeated under his breath. And the rugged countenance set in a strange hardness.

Kenton nodded.

"A few drops of some dark liquid out of a tiny phial. And it was done furtively. Just by chance I caught the action out of the corner of my eye."

"Then—my waiter—didn't see—what happened?"

"No, sir. I don't think he had any suspicion of what was being done. He was hunting among his slips for the particular chit which belonged to that table. He left a slip and came on to you with his tray."

The older man rose to his feet, as if to hurry out, but Kenton held up a hand.

"You can't get him. I went after him myself, and he bolted, over the railing, across sampans, and I think he jumped into a launch."

The other returned to the table and sat down. His face was grave and his eyes seemed faded as if from strain or lack of sleep. As he stared at Kenton he seemed to be fearful of something and his fingers twitched.

"I suppose," he said weakly, "somebody was trying to poison me."

"I don't know about that, sir," said the American. "It would've been risky business for you to drink the wine. If it had been a Chinese in here, perhaps I wouldn't have taken the liberty I did. A man never knows what he'll walk into, you know, when chinks are involved."

The look of consternation in the face of the other now changed to sudden suspicion.

"But how did you know I wasn't a Chinese?"

Kenton's answer was prompt and disarming.

"Because I heard your first order to the waiter—a glass of port, but a bottle later when your friend joined you."

The other nodded.

"Yes. That's right. If that friend had been here with me—I mean, I can't think why anybody should want to put me out of the way."

He shook a carefully groomed gray head, and his fingers tapped on the table. He was doubtful, yet worried more than he cared to reveal.

"It's a pity you didn't get a look at the chink who tampered with your wine," said Kenton. "You might have recognized him."

"Any particular description?"

"No, except that he didn't look as if he could afford to be in this place. Wore the usual blue jacket and trousers. About twenty-two, I'd say. Had short hair. He certainly was quick on his feet; he was gone in a flash."

"You said before that he got away in a launch."

Kenton nodded.

"I thought so, but he may not have been in the launch. Anyway, I didn't see its name. It was away over near the other side of the canal. Probably waiting for him. Anyhow, as he disappeared over the tops of lorchas, the launch dug out, hell bent."

The gray haired man offered a hand.

"Thank you for what you did. I'm a bit late in saying so, but the whole thing gave me a jolt, you know. In fact, I'm rather stupid; it's all so unbelievable."

Kenton shook hands.

"I can well understand that, sir. And I'm sorry I had to be so abrupt, but I knew I couldn't lose a second if you were to be stopped from tasting that wine."

A quick glance took in the shantung suit worn by Kenton. It was clean and well pressed, but it was just beginning to show a breaking of its threads at the cuffs of the coat.

"You don't belong in the city?"

"No, sir. I'm from San Francisco—originally."

"How long have you been here, Mr. Kenton?"

"Got in a week ago from Swatow."

"Would you mind if I ask you if you've ever been here before?"

"I was here about four days, two—no, three—years ago."

The older man took an engraved card from a case.

"Come and see me, Mr. Kenton," he said. "Maybe I can be of some service to you in return."

Kenton's eyes were on the card.

"So you're Mr. Pickard, of Benjamin Anderson and Company!" Kenton exclaimed with evident interest.

"You've heard of me before?" asked Pickard, pleased at the young man's attitude.

Kenton smiled shyly.

"Of course! The local manager for Benjamin Anderson and Company—I've heard you mentioned many times, and—"

"Yes, I'm fairly well known," broke in Pickard. "That makes it easy for me to return your favor—if there's any way in which I can serve you, and if you'll be so kind as to allow me." Again he put out a hand. "I want to put you up at the Bund Club, Mr. Kenton."

But Kenton appeared to be somewhat embarrassed. He flushed.

"I'm afraid I can't afford to hold my own at a club like that," he replied. "I appreciate your thinking of it. But I hope you won't feel you're under any obligations to me."

"Nonsense!" Pickard's voice was hearty, though still subdued. "Of course, I'm

under an obligation. You'll pardon me if I assume—after what you've just said about the club—that you're not overloaded with funds. I'm sure, if that's the case—"

"It's no secret," laughed Kenton, coloring again. "To be frank, I'm looking for employment. In the shipping business. The company that employed me last—Struthers and Gaunt of Swatow—you know them, of course—they suspended payment. I was in their export department, and I had to look around. Of course, I've got recommendations."

PICKARD rose and laid a hand on Kenton's shoulder.

"I'll see what's open. Leave it to me. It'll be simple enough to get you into something you like. And I must insist on doing what I can, Mr. Kenton. In Benjamin Anderson and Company, most of our men come under indentures, and the head office sends them to us. The owner, Mr. Anderson—"

"Oh, I know their chopmark well," said Kenton quickly. "Pun-jam-min An-ta-sun."

"Benjamin Anderson, right," said Pickard.

"But I interrupted," reminded Kenton. "Never dreamed I'd have a chance to enter the firm under you, sir. Naturally, I'm a little excited. I've looked around pretty thoroughly here, and I was discouraged. I was thinking of getting away and having a try at Singapore, or some of the other big ports."

"Write your address," said Pickard, pushing Kenton's card across the corner of the tablecloth.

Kenton opened his fountain pen and wrote a street and number under his name.

"I'll send for you," said Pickard, as he reached for his glasses and scanned the card.

"It's just a small room in Customhouse Street," Kenton explained. "Lodgings are cheap there, and I'm in with an old friend of mine of the name of Yates. If I don't happen to be in, your boy can leave word with Yates. Now you can understand, Mr. Pickard, what a jump it would be from Customhouse Street to the Bund Club." He smiled in his shy manner.

"It's a good neighborhood," insisted Pickard. "Many of our English clerks have their quarters there. But if you don't mind my saying so," the older man went on, with an appraising glance at Kenton, "you'd fit better at the club than in Customhouse Street. You're too modest, Kenton; I can see you're a gentleman, but you don't lose anything with me by being frank. The curse of this place is a lot of swankers pretending to be millionaires on clerk's wages."

Kenton bowed and laughed lightly.

"I prefer to keep within my means," he said.

"I may be able to put you into something temporary," Pickard went on. "It'll probably do, until I find something better. Are you sure you don't need something in the way of advance salary."

"I'm all right, if I get to work without delay. And I appreciate your offer."

"I'll want to get in touch with you promptly about this wine business here this afternoon. It's something I want to go into a little deeper." He offered his hand again.

Kenton departed, got his sun helmet and paid his check. And as he passed out into the blinding light of the street, he saw Pickard leave the private room and speak to Quong Loo quietly. The proprietor of the Café of Ten Thousand Sublime Hopes conducted Pickard to a second private room in a far corner of the place.

Anthony Kenton, in the crowds of the narrow street, drew aside into the shadow of an awning of a tiny shop, took a cigaret from a cheap case and fumbled through his pockets.

A rickshaw pulled up at the curb and a man in a khaki suit left it. He was a young man, probably a few years older than Kenton, freckled across the eyes and sunburned across the chin, with reddish hair over his ears under the battered old khaki helmet which he wore askew on his

head. He was smoking a cigar, the bright red band still unbroken about its middle.

"Could I trouble you for a match?" asked Kenton

"Sure, buddy!" said the sunburned one. "Take a light off this, if it's all the same to you." He held forward the cigar. As Kenton leaned down to light his cigaret, the lips of the sunburned man moved a little. "Tsang has been in there ten minutes," he said in barely audible tones.

"Thanks awfully," said Kenton and, turning away, walked down the street, smiling softly under the shade of his sun helmet, which was drawn well down to protect his face from the glare of the sun.

CHAPTER II

TSANG GETS HIS ORDERS

THERE was a Chinese waiting for Pickard in the private room he entered after Kenton left the Café of Ten Thousand Sublime Hopes. He rose as Pickard entered, made a jerky bow, and let his hands slip into the wide sleeves of his blouse. As he bowed he lowered his look and, for an instant, between his thin, dry lips, there showed a double row of teeth—small, perfectly regular, and too amazingly even and white to be the teeth of any man. He was of middle age, thin, but of a wiry aspect. Above his right eye there was an irregular clay white spot which was like a scar. A few straggling hairs on upper lip and chin gave him a sparse mustache and beard. He still wore a queue which was partly gray, and braided toward the end with threads of red silk. It ended in a red silk tassel, now looped about his stringy throat and hanging down in front over the left shoulder.

His dress was that of the small merchant class, dark blue cotton trousers wrapped around the ankles, a sleeveless black cotton coat, heavily stitched in spirals and frogged down its front, and an under jacket of black silk, the sleeves long and capacious. He wore a plain, round black buttoned cap.

Pickard regarded the Chinese with a severely accusing look. And the white man, with a gesture of his hand at his wine stained coat, sat and leaned forward across the table.

"Tsang," he began, "just what do you think you're trying to pull on me?"

The Chinese surveyed the splotches on the garment of Pickard. With slightly knitted brows, he stared.

"From what did this damage come?" he asked. In one hand he held a red slip of paper on which were painted several black, fat ideograms, and under these were some words written in English.

"So you don't know anything about it, eh?" growled Pickard.

Tsang lifted from the floor beside his chair a bulky pigskin bag that had double sturdy handles and laid it on the table. Then he held forward the red slip of paper.

"If Mr. Pickard will make sure of the count," he suggested, his tone respectful, "and sign for what I have brought, I can return to my business." His English was faultlessly precise.

Unlike that first booth which Pickard had occupied while waiting, this one had a shell paned window which opened on the veranda. A dim light entered through the panes. Pickard thrust his face into the glow of the light, and scowled.

"Never mind your business for now," he said sharply but with proper caution. "You see the wine on my coat. You had a hand in that, and don't try to make a fool of me."

His look bored between the narrow lids of the yellow man.

Tsang, apparently puzzled, again stared at the spots on Pickard's white coat. The red paper did not tremble in his hand. He was totally impassive and his look did not waver; nor did he betray any concern, or guilt.

"Mr. Pickard," said the Chinese finally, "the statements you make are not entirely understood by my brain. That is my misfortune. It is beyond my simple

intelligence to know how I could have anything to do with the wine you have spilled so injuriously."

The next instant Pickard was on his feet. He leaned forward and clamped his hands down on each of Tsang's black coated shoulders. Holding the Chinese in place, Pickard's fingers curled to grip the bony frame under the jacket; and then he slowly pushed the other back against the frail, carved and lacquered wall of the booth—slowly and gently, yet with a show of fierce violence held well in reserve.

"I know the game you're playing with me, Tsang," he warned in a furious whisper. "You had a man planted on me here today, to drop poison in my wine!"

Tsang's dark and bright little eyes glowed with a new fire as his heavy lids lifted higher and he peered into the angry face before him. He showed the teeth that were so regular, gasped, and the teeth rattled loosely in his mouth. With a twist of his jaw he worked the plate back into place and then spoke.

"I have done nothing with poison."

Pickard tightened the grip of his fingers and Tsang gave a hiss of pain.

"You try that with me again and I'll twist your neck off!" Pickard warned.

Tsang's look was still one of frank astonishment. In spite of the threat and the closer hold of the gripping fingers, the Chinese was apparently devoid of fear.

"I do not yet understand," he protested, speaking barely above a whisper. "No, Mr. Pickard, I know only that you are filled with an idea that is in error."

"Error be damned!" Pickard retorted, still keeping his own voice low. "One of your men tampered with my glass as the waiter was passing, and then skipped. Quong Loo knows it. The place was in an uproar for a minute. And I'll bet that you were inside here all the time and heard it all, too! Now, just remember that I won't stand for any yellow tricks!"

Something like comprehension showed in Tsang's expression. His thin features lifted to show his white teeth in an ironic smile.

"Mr. Pickard!" he exclaimed in sorrowful reproof. "Is it like the work of Tsang Hun Lin to kill with poison his most profitable client?"

PICKARD loosed his grasp and returned to his chair. He was trembling with controlled wrath. His pale lips were firmly compressed.

Tsang went on, low and suave:

"In my tongue, we have the old, very old, saying: 'Does a wise man expect to fry fish for his dinner if he destroys the trap?' "

His smile had become good natured and his mouth displayed his gorgeous false teeth, shining whitely like ivory seen through a slit of yellow parchment. He picked up the red slip of paper and fingered it suggestively.

Pickard did not reply. He still glowered, and a strange pallor was over his face. Reaching across the narrow table, he grasped the handles of the pigskin bag and lifted it a couple of inches, testing its weight. He dropped it, and the table shook under the impact and swayed a trifle on its delicate legs. Then Pickard sat back and rubbed his chin with the tips of his fingers.

"Hand me that paper," he said curtly.

Tsang presented the paper and bowed again.

"If you wish, it will be safe to count—"

"Never mind a count up," said Pickard. "I'll sign. But when you think I'm worth a couple of hundred thousand dollars in gold to you—dead of poison—" he paused and again bored the depths of Tsang's eyes with a savage scowl—"you'd better think again, Tsang Hun Lin. You've played that game before, but don't try it on with me!"

He reached for the red paper slip, which the Chinese gave over from his thin fingers. Pickard scanned it and signed with a double scrawling pair of initials. His humor was still bad and his mood doubtful. When he leaned back again he was frowning, and there was hatred in his gaze.

"Remember that I've given you fair

warning," he said. "If you don't play fair with me, you haven't got a chance in the world! I have men who guard me night and day. So if you try anything else, of this kind, like the wine—" he tapped the stained coat—"you're likely to find yourself in a bad jam. You've made more than one man shoot himself, and I know why now, but if you think you can get rid of me, you'll find yourself dead before I pass out."

Tsang picked up the red paper and hid it in a sleeve. He kept his hands concealed while he let his eyes wander over the elaborate embroidery of a curtain.

"A man can not repeat," he said presently, and with respectful tones, "an act which he has not once performed. Business has been pleasant between us till this day, and now you speak of things which have not come to my knowledge."

Pickard made a dismissing gesture with his hand.

"I'm going to give you just five days with what you have of mine in your hands. Do you understand clearly? Not ten days, but five, and also, we will not meet in this place again. I've had my stomach full of the Café of Ten Thousand Sublime Hopes and its waiters that play into your hands with my wine. I don't even trust old Quong Loo now, and I'll bet that he knows the waiter was primed to help your poisoner."

The mention of the curtailment of time so engrossed the thought of the Chinese that he entirely missed the statement concerning Quong Loo and the waiter. He was engaged in mental calculation, his eyes on the ceiling.

"Five days!" he murmured sadly. "The time is short. The work will need more men. And more men means more risk for me—and your respected self."

"Never you mind more men," said Pickard crisply. "You use the time getting it all back, a little at a time. Move it into my hands, that's what I mean. And without delay!"

Tsang's hands were still hidden in the wide sleeves, and he held them politely before him at the waistline. Now he bowed over them.

"It will be as Mr. Pickard commands," he said. "And where shall I deliver?"

"I'll let you know that. On short notice, too. I won't give you any time to lay any traps for me. From now on I don't trust anybody—not anybody."

Tsang's hands came forth from the two sleeves to make a gesture of sorrowful acceptance of the situation. Next, they lifted the pigskin bag a trifle, to mark a formal surrender of it.

"You will find the contents correct," he said.

"You've got your orders," Pickard went on curtly. "You can go now." Then, as the Chinese half turned, "I'll expect as much again by tomorrow, at this hour, at a place I will specify."

Arms at his sides, Tsang lowered his head to the white man until the black button on his cap was on a level with the cummerbund about Pickard's waist. That parting bow, so deferential, hid from the other a look that would have increased Pickard's apprehension if he had observed it. Tsang's face was full of hate and cunning.

CHAPTER III

BY CANDLELIGHT

"WE'VE got to see into the place," Anthony Kenton was whispering in the dark of a small, second story room near the waterfront.

"Only thing to do, buddy," came an answering whisper.

"No use waiting for him to open his window," Kenton declared. "He'll never do that after dark, no matter how hot it is."

The room they were looking from was at the rear of a sailors' boarding house. They were leaning upon a high window sill, the shell paned sash swung outward, letting in the not unpleasant odor of liquid sugar. By day the window commanded the entire length of a six foot wide alley. But with a pale and aging moon just touching the tiles of neighbor-

ing roofs, the tiny thoroughfare below them was a pit of blackness.

They were watching a building of one story, a ruin of a place, centuries old. Above its shutter door of corrugated iron was the sign that had told Kenton, when he discovered it, who was doing business behind those thick, ancient and begrimed walls. The sign was painted in a quaint English, and read:

TSANG HUN LIN

REPAIR MAKING BEST KIND FOR FOREIGN WHEELERY SURE FIX AGAIN NOT BREAK OFF

Though the hour was now well past midnight, a strange racket of grindings and poundings issued from the old structure, pervading the alley and penetrating the back rooms of the lodging house. Occasionally, mingled with the hard raspings and the battering, jouncing noises, the two men at the upper casement could hear another sound—the clear jangle of small pieces of metal.

"We'll have to work it the way I pointed out today," Kenton went on. "When we get to Tsang's wall, at the left side there, I'll go up the front of that house next door to our left, and out on Tsang's roof. You follow."

"It won't be a hard climb," was the confident answer. "His roof is low."

"No, it won't be hard, but it'll be dangerous, Yates," said Kenton. "Sure your gun's in good shape?"

"Buddy, my gun's always in shape. And I've got a knife that might come handy in the dark."

"They'll bump us off, if they catch us watchin' 'em," said Kenton. "So be careful not to kick a tile loose when you get up there. But if we accidentally give ourselves away, you know what I said about avoiding a ruckus. Fight if you have to, but clear out first across to the other side of the roof if you can. Now, are we all set to go?"

"You're the man to say when. I'll follow brains any old time, and you've got 'em. Lead me to it."

Kenton drew in the paned shutters. The other stepped into a corner of the room. Behind a hanging curtain beside a bed he struck a match and examined an automatic pistol. The flame of the match revealed him as a man dressed in khaki, with heavily sunburned jaws. It was he who had given Kenton a light from a cigar just after the latter had left the Café of Ten Thousand Sublime Hopes.

THE MATCH out, they crept down the stone stairs in the darkness. Outside, the cobbled stones of the narrow, shadowy street upon which the boarding house fronted still reeked with the heat of the day, and the pulse of busy night life was beating lively, there in the river district of the gigantic city. Cautiously Kenton led the way to the upper end of Tsang's tiny gut of an alley, deep and inky, shadowed from the rays of the moon. A hot draft of air swept through it like the panting breath of a dragon.

They halted to make sure the alley was empty. Satisfied that it was, they stole along it until they were standing against the juncture of Tsang's wall with his neighbor's building on that side. Here they looked and listened a second time. The darkness of the alley made it impossible for them to see anything or anybody who might be moving in it; and the whang and bumpings that sounded from within the repair shop prevented their hearing any movements in the thick blackness which seemed to drift like a fog on the odorous air.

Kenton touched his companion and leaned to whisper into his ear.

"We've got to chance it, Yates. While I'm going up, turn your back to the wall and be ready with your gun, because I can be seen when I come out on the roof."

At once he climbed from a low window sill of the house to the top of the window. From there, by a secure hold on a corner of the building, he was able to step out on the tiles of Tsang's gently sloping roof. Then he crouched quickly, lay down just

above where Yates stood and drew from his pocket an automatic pistol.

Yates made his ascent in the same way, without any betraying accident. The dim light disclosed his stocky dark dressed figure topped by a cloth cap. And Yates lifted a pair of green eyes against the old moon, and his thin Celtic face peered along the tiles. Without speaking, he stretched himself beside Kenton on the hot half cylinders which covered the roof, the cap on the back of his head and his legs stretched toward the eaves.

Flattened out thus, each man carefully began working at a tile to dislodge it. Almost at the same time both managed to slide their tiles down, lifting out one below enough to make a narrow slit. The roof was hot. With their faces pressed against the tiles below, the sweat started from their skin as they looked down into the repair shop.

It was a large, low, candle lighted room floored with broad and uneven flagstones. One corner of it was shut off by a high, heavy screen of matting. Behind the screen was a score of casks. Occupying the remainder of the floor space, and nearer to the watchers, was what explained that steady, mysterious racket which tortured the neighborhood.

This was a great treadmill, its wooden wheels reaching almost to the faces of the watchers on the roof. Two Chinese coolies, stripped to the waist, their queues swinging against their sweat glistening backs like coiling snakes, were climbing the rungs of the double wooden wheels, which turned big cranks fashioned of bamboo on a long shafting of the same material.

The rise and fall of the cranks made a dull grinding. From each crank hung a loose sack containing some material that was evidently heavy. At every revolution bamboo rods, which protruded from the wall and from floor and ceiling, interfered with the movement of the sacks so their rotations were successions of bumps. And they struck the stone flagging of the floor at the bottom of each circuit.

THERE was a third Chinese in the repair shop. Seen at a downward slant, his skinny appearance and his scantily whiskered face, and the small white scar over the right eyebrow, at once identified him as Tsang Hun Lin. Now he was dressed in a fashion that suited his pretended calling of a mechanic who repaired machinery. His faded blue cotton trousers were hacked off at the knees, his fleshless shanks were bare, his feet were shod with straw sandals, his jacket was patched. But he did not wear his perfect false teeth, so his lips hung slackly and quivered as he breathed.

Yates lifted his head and turned to whisper in Kenton's ear.

"Who'd think that old scarecrow of a chink could sling English like a lady professor?"

Kenton looked up and nodded.

The coolies on the wheels were not able to see Tsang, for the tall matted screen cut them off from that part of the room. And beside Tsang where he sat among rows of casks was a candle. And he presently picked up a pair of iron rimmed spectacles, hung them over his ears and on his nose and examined something he had scooped up in his cupped hands. As he turned, Kenton could see that what Tsang was holding seemed to be gleaming yellow disks.

Kenton raised himself slightly and touched his companion.

"Can you see what he's got, Mike?" The mill beneath made so much noise that there was no danger of the loud whisper being heard.

"You certainly had the dope right," said Yates. "Me, I wouldn't've been so sure. He's got the goods, or I'm seein' things."

Tsang swung his cupped hands over a cask, above the bunghole. He let the disks trickle through his fingers, guiding them carefully so none would escape over the sides.

"And he's filling the casks!" whispered Kenton.

Yates nodded without lifting his head.

"That means he's getting ready to jump out."

"And the sacks are full of it, too," whispered Yates.

Kenton gave him a warning nudge. As if Tsang had caught the sound of their hushed voices, he turned and looked over his shoulder with a quick movement. His posture at once became tense and fearful. He closed his bony fingers over the disks he was holding, shutting them into his palms. Reassured almost at once, with the ends of his wide sleeves he dried away the sweat which oozed and dripped from his sparsely bearded chin.

"Think he heard anything—from up here?" whispered Yates in a few minutes.

"No. He watches the coolies through a slit in the screen. He's afraid they'll see what he's doing."

For another hour the two watchers observed the work done in the repair shop, and saw no change in its routine. The treadmill ground on, driven by its weary man power. Tsang sat among the casks, examining handfuls of metal and emptying the disks into casks. Now and then he passed in and out between the screened part of the room and the space given to the mill, keeping a wary eye on the workers.

Then the two overheard new sounds—four sharp blows on the corrugated iron of the door. The shop's proprietor was in the act of dropping a double handful of yellow disks into a cask. He started, hastily emptied his hands, snatched up a length of matting which he threw across the top of the cask, and made for the entrance.

Kenton and Yates listened while there followed a cautious signaling by means of taps on the iron door. Then Tsang bent his body double, seized two handles on the bottom of the door, and it went rasping upward, shutter-wise, to the height of his own knees. Into the light from the cobblestones of the alley there rolled the doubled up body of a Chinese. As this man got to his knees to rise, Tsang rasped the shutter door down.

THE NEWCOMER was naked except for a breech cloth. Standing, he made Tsang a jerky bow. He appeared to be a queueless, burden bearing coolie. Yet there was something distinctive about him, something beyond the ordinary.

For one thing, his muscular development was remarkable. His chest was well rounded, his back was like a professional wrestler's, his thighs had not the usual flatness of the average coolie's, but were big and solid. His arms seemed overshort, but this was on account of their peculiar thickness. His hands, darker than the arms—evidence that the latter were not always as bare as then—were square, lean and strong. And as he moved he had the lithe and perfect motions of a juggler.

"That one looks more like an acrobat than a coolie," said Kenton.

"I wouldn't want him to land on my jaw with that right of his," said Yates. "If he's got a brother he's one of these here gorilla monkeys that bends gun barrels into hairpins."

They fell silent as Tsang conducted his visitor past the great treadmill and behind the screen. There the shop's proprietor seated himself on the cask he had covered with matting. The new arrival squatted beside him.

At once Tsang began a lengthy speech, with animated gestures. Constantly the coolie nodded in eager assent and understanding. When Tsang finished and again stood, the other Chinese lifted his face to stare up at the older man. Kenton and Yates got a view of a tight skinned full face, raggedly fringed with short hair. In that face the mouth appeared as a black hole. The coolie had no teeth.

Tsang disappeared for a moment. When he returned, what he had in his hands brought the younger Chinese to his feet, while he eyed it intently. Then he reached forward and took from Tsang's hand what appeared to be loops of a strong cord, and drew it out, testing its strength between his outstretched arms. At one end there was a small loop, and at the other an elaborate knot.

The coolie stood with his bare feet spread out, and tugged at the cord, as if seeking to break it. Next, with a nod of approval, he proceeded to wind it about his middle, tucking it down under the waist fold of his breech cloth.

"What's that business, anyhow?" asked Yates. "Rope ladder?"

"You might call it that," said Kenton. "It's a strangling cord."

"Ladder to chink heaven, eh? I wonder who's elected."

Once more Tsang went to the door, motioning the coolie to precede him. As the latter obeyed, he forebore even to glance upward at the men on the treadmill, but kept his look discreetly to the front. The shutter of the exit again rasped open to the height of Tsang's knee. The coolie curled down upon the flagstones and with a sudden twist of his almost naked body, rolled out into the alley. Tsang drew down the iron shutter door and returned to his work.

Kenton lifted himself on his elbows.

"Perhaps you'd better tail after that chap, and see where he's bound for, Mike."

"This is no place for you to get caught out alone, buddy," said Yates. "Worse'n No Man's Land. I stick with you."

Kenton stretched himself again, and just then something happened which was totally unexpected by the watchers and Tsang. One of the sacks hanging from a crank became worn through by the pounding on the bamboo rods and burst while at the top of a turn. From the gaping canvas a shower of yellow disks scattered over the floor.

The flags beneath the torn sack became a maze of rolling, circling, spinning gold pieces. The pair on the roof watched the accident with keen interest. To the coolies on the mill, the effect of the accident was even more surprising, for it proved that they had never surmised the contents of the sacks they had kept whirling on the cranks. Their feet froze upon the rungs of the wheels. They looked at the floor in astonishment. The wheels ceased to turn and the mill stopped. Silence came with a last musical clinking of coins coming to rest upon stones.

Tsang, turning from the door, gazed intently at the coolies, his head thrown back, a man aghast at the sight before him. His secret was revealed beyond any hope of attempting to mislead his workers longer. The coolies, gazing down upon the treasure, remained poised as motionlessly as if they were figures cast from bronze.

Tsang's right hand moved swiftly to a box close to the screen. The coolies paid no attention to the movement. The glint of gold under candlelight was in their eyes and they saw nothing else.

But Kenton and Yates could see the glint of white steel from Tsang's hand. His bony fingers were gripped about the handle of a knife.

CHAPTER IV

TSANG LOADS HIS CARGO

THE TWO coolies on the treadmill dropped from their perches upon the yellow heap upon the floor. They began to gather the shining disks with frantic hands. Their fingers pressed the disks under loin cloths; they crammed their mouths full until their cheeks bulged. They reached and clutched and stuffed, with queer wild gurgling cries, mad with the lust for more gold than they ever expected to see in all their lives.

The sight of their greed put Tsang into motion. With the knife held behind him, he slowly started forward, with a crouching gait. Then with a growl and a wheezing cry he leaped upon the nearest man.

As he sprang, Tsang struck, and into the blow he put all the weight of his thin body. He gave a twist to the blade. The force of the leap and the moaning grunt of the victim as he fell sprawling on his face into the gold roused the other coolie to his danger. He lifted from his knees and, staring for an instant, he clapped both filled hands to his chest and leaped into the air. As he opened his fingers to grasp at the closed window be-

yond the mill, he was showered with the gold which fell from his hands.

Tsang was also on his feet, leaving the inert body behind him. The fleeing Chinese vaulted like a monkey to the high sill and pounded at the shell panes. Tsang lifted a bar of iron over his head and hurled it. The coolie's head thudded against the sash, he tottered, bent backward and fell with the clang of the bar into the crude machinery of the mill. And golden disks fell from his breech cloth like sparks from an anvil and tinkled across the flagging. The man fell upon his face without a cry. He lay sprawled grotesquely upon the floor, and as he died, his long fingers scraped about and clutched upon stray coins.

Tsang climbed to the window and stuffed a small broken shell pane with an old coat. Then he gathered the coins from under the machinery and searched the bodies for gold hidden in the loin cloths. And when he had plucked yellow disks from the lips of the dead men, he carried the screen across the room and placed it about his victims.

With a stubby old broom Tsang swept the scattered gold from the floor into the broken sack. Then he resumed filling a cask. He made little noise, and a strange quiet reigned, broken below only by the hollow clinking of the gold dropping into the cask.

For the first time Kenton and Yates became conscious of the noises of the surrounding city—piping voices, the clatter of pans by early rising cooks, the creakings of hemp presses, the whining of baling machines and the clicking of poles on slow moving lorchas along the canal. Long before daylight the toilers were resuming their tasks, and the soft padding of barefoot trotting carriers came from the street, the thudding of the hoofs of water buffaloes, and the low rumble of buffalo carts. The waterfront began to throb with engines of tugs and the clinking of shovels and the clanking of fire doors.

Tsang was now working fast, filling cask after cask from the sacks that had been hanging on the cranks. The sweat rolled from his face, and he wiped it away with a sleeve, while his hands flew.

Finally the last piece of gold was casked, and he drove home the bung. He straightened up, lighted a cigaret, paced the floor for a minute, his head lowered thoughtfully. Then he went to the back of the shop and out of sight. Kenton and Yates could hear him in careful sing-song phrases, talking over a telephone. He returned, circled the room and blew out all the candles but one. Then he began rolling the casks toward the door on planks which he drew from the side of the room.

A NEW series of sounds came from the far end of the alley—a grinding and a squeaking, mingled with a long drawn hissing, as if a tired giant were wearily emptying his lungs and filling them again gaspingly. And above it all was a dull rumbling over the cobblestones. A line of buffalo carts was coming into the alley from the street.

By the time the first cart was opposite the door Tsang had it open. Four coolies entered, brisk and businesslike, as if loading casks from the shop was no new job for them. They were bare legged with naked shoulders. Without orders, they placed their gangways and began rolling casks into the cart. The next cart moved up into position, and the work went on until nine carts had been loaded.

Tsang put out the flickering candle, moved into the alley and drew down his iron door. They could hear him putting the iron bars into place and snapping the padlocks which secured it from the outside.

Kenton lifted himself on his elbows as Yates sat up. They listened to the diminishing rumble of the line of carts.

"You had it right about the schooner," said Kenton. "I'd say those carts will make the canal at the bridge where the *Rusa* is laying."

"Oh, boy!" said Yates quietly. "Once, he gets that gold aboard the schooner he's our meat!"

"That's where we want him," said

Kenton. "At sea we've got a free hand. All I hope is that Bogue's got the *Tung-hai* loaded and will be ready to sail. We've got to catch that schooner before she gets to Kawal Island."

"Well, we wouldn't lose out, would we, even if he beat us to Kawal?" asked Yates.

"I'm not so sure of that, Mike. Tsang and his gang control the place, and if he ever gets that gold on the island, he'll give us a run for the money. It's a great hide-away for the gang, and nearly every chink there is a killer."

"We should've mopped that gold up before he got it away, if you want my opinion, buddy. It's foolish to let it slip out of our hands the way we have to-night," said Yates.

"I'll tell you what you do," advised Kenton. "You trail along after the carts and make sure the casks are loaded into the *Rusa*. In the meantime, I think Tsang overlooked a few coins under the machine below. I need a couple for samples. I'll move out enough of these tiles to swing down and flash around. Meet me at the room. I want you to write a note to Mr. Pickard that we'll need him before night, if the schooner sails. It's looking along toward daylight."

"I'd better stick with you until you're out of that dump under us," said Yates. "Tsang's likely to come back."

"You slide along, kid," said Kenton. "I've got the flashlight with me, and it won't take more than a couple of minutes. We can't chance it to let those casks get shifted to some place besides the schooner. We've got to know where they are." He began lifting tiles and piling them to one side.

"You're the boss," said Yates.

He edged back along the roof, swung carefully down to the footing which had aided him up, and the next minute was hurrying out of the alley.

KENTON dropped through the hole in the roof to rafters and stringers, and let himself drop to the floor. With the flashlight he hunted through the cranks and the open shafts. A yellow glitter under the light drew his attention, and he reached far in and brought out a pair of twenty dollar pieces. They were smooth and bright, like old coins which had seen much wear, and he examined them carefully. Slipping them into his pocket, he shut off the light and felt his way to the upright which led to the hole in the tiles.

In a few minutes he had gained the roof and, replacing the tiles, he cautiously got into the alley, just as cocks were beginning to crow in a nearby market.

He staggered into the street, pretending to be drunk, and wandered along with his cap in his hand, as if aimlessly walking until he had sobered and could find his way to his lodgings. The river breeze was beginning to blow, and it would not be long before dawn.

CHAPTER V

PICKARD HAS A VISITOR

THOUGH it was well after midnight, Pickard was sleeping brokenly and at intervals. This was not due to the heat of the night, for he was covered with a light blanket, but to a feeling which had been steadily growing since he left Tsang Hun Lin at the Café of Ten Thousand Sublime Hopes.

Pickard felt that he was in a trap. He well knew the significance of the attempt on his life. And now that he had told the wily Chinese that the whole business must be cleared up at once, Pickard knew that his danger was increased. He wished that he had brought Anthony Kenton home with him.

A launch whistled on the river. It seemed to be more than a mere navigation signal, for the blasts were long drawn out, as if in a warning to somebody ashore. The river curved at the front of his lawn and he could hear the soft wash of water along the sand. He raised on an elbow. The cane bottomed bed creaked with amazing loudness in the one story house. The room was in thick darkness. He listened.

Half an hour passed. He was leaning

back on his pillow, half dozing, when a sound near at hand brought him awake with such a start that his heart pounded rapidly. Cautiously reaching out his right hand, he lifted the mosquito netting hanging against the side of the bed. His fingers came in contact with a string which led from the headpost of his bed to the knob of the bedroom door. Slowly he pulled down on the string, which opened the door noiselessly.

Now he was able to see into a small room toward the front of the house, a room he used as study and library. There a lamp was burning on the library table, but dimly, for before going to bed he had provided the electric globe with an extra shade. Nothing moved, however, except a large white moth that had managed to gain entrance to the room through a large meshed rattan screen. By turns it circled the covered light and cast itself against the double shade. In the stillness the creature's wings made a noise all out of proportion to their size.

The presence of the moth worried Pickard. At bedtime, with his own hands he had lashed the awnings of the lighted room tight down against the sills of the unpaned windows, opening on the veranda; he had lashed them so close that no gap was left between awning and casing. And there had been no moth in the study when he left it. He wondered how this one had entered. It seemed incredible.

Slowly he drew himself to an upright position. Then again he waited. His heart had resumed its normal beat. He almost held his breath. Faintly in the distance came the moan of a motor horn, and again a whistle that came from that bend of the river. Now he understood the whistling. Two launches were passing each other, one bound downriver, and the other coming up.

Again he caught that nearby sound. It was a suspicious noise, a dull rasping, as if something were being sawed with the blade of a knife. He identified the sound at once, and once more his heart bounded. There could be no doubt; a knife was being drawn across the lashings of the study awning.

There was a snap. An awning frame, slightly bent by the pressure it sustained by the lashing which made it fast, had been cut and relieved of strain.

Somebody was preparing to come in from the veranda.

As the rasping was presently resumed, Pickard faced half about and put a pajamaed leg over the side of the bed. Then carefully he crept under the netting and out. In his left hand he held a flashlight; in his right an automatic pistol.

As he straightened and took a slow backward step in his bare feet, he heard a cautious footfall in the next room. It was the brushing sound of a felt shod foot on a floor left purposely uncarpeted. It came again, a soft smack. Then another and another. The intruder was crossing the space between window sill and bedroom door.

Pickard's eyes never left the lighted frame of the door. There was a pause between footfalls in the outer room. The forefinger of his left hand moved to rest on the button of the flashlight, the second finger of his right tightened a little against the trigger. Backed against a wall, once more he waited, breathlessly.

The light in the library suddenly went out.

From where he stood Pickard had not been able to see the doubly shaded globe. He assumed that a hand had turned off the switch. It was possible that the service wire to the house had been cut.

A heavy darkness now obliterated everything in both rooms. Pickard could feel the pulse in his fingers under the pressure which had both light and gun ready for action. He was calm.

Now the feet soled with felt resumed their journey across the library floor. They gained the threshold. Pickard counted the steps. And the sixth step, he reckoned, brought the man to the foot of the bed. He lifted the electric torch, pointed it and bore down upon the button switch.

As the cone of light struck upon the

netting and blanket, for two seconds it shone full upon a crouched figure. It was a powerful Chinese, his great arms thrust forward as he felt his way along the bed. The yellow face stared blindly into the glare. The almost naked body froze into immobility.

In that clear view of the man, Pickard noted three things. The lifted face was young and full cheeked; the gaping mouth was toothless; the crouched bare body, etched with swelled veins and tense sinews, was wide and powerful.

He fired.

At the same instant he shouted an alarm to bring his servants, let the flashlight go dark, and sprang to one side. The human target stumbled backward and crashed into the open bedroom door, turned and scrambled through it, and fled out to the veranda by the same way he had come.

THERE was a scurrying all about the rear of the house. Then the voice of his No. 1 boy called from the outer hall, and there came a frightened tapping on the other side of the wall behind the head of the bed.

"All right," Pickard called back. "All right. Only bad dream sleep."

The boy mumbled something and left. Pickard stole to the bedroom door, shut and locked it, then once more he pressed the button of the flashlight and examined the room. He found no bloodstains to indicate that he had wounded the intruder. He located the bullet, flattened into the hard wood of the door casing. Then something on the floor, partly under the foot of the bed, drew his eyes. It was snakelike, and it lay in a coil.

Bending down, with the end of the pistol barrel he drew the object toward him until it was in full view under the flashlight. It seemed at first look to be the cord from a pair of portières at the entrance hall of the house. It was braided, with blue and green silk strands mixed with dark brown fibers which were faded or bleached into a peculiar softness. He noted the small loop and the knot passed through it. As he held it before him, he stared at it in horror as he understood its purpose.

It was a Chinese strangling cord.

The noose formed by loop and knot was ready—for his own throat. He thrust the pistol through it and observed how the cord ran with a soft and pliant motion, not unlike the graceful undulations of a snake. He hung the coils upon his right wrist. Then he sat down, limp and pale.

From his watch on the bedside table he saw that the time was a trifle past two o'clock. Presently he hid the cord in the pocket of his coat. There was no more sleep in him. He rang for the No. 1 boy, ordered tea, put on a light dressing gown, took a blanket with him, and lighted his way with the flashlight to the dining room.

The lamps there would not burn. Candles were brought. After he had eaten and drunk and had reassured the boy that a fuse must have blown to put out the lights, he felt less shaken. He set about writing a message to Anthony Kenton at the address in Customhouse Street.

Finished, the message ran:

> My dear Mr. Kenton:
>
> Will you call at my office as soon after receiving this as possible?

When he had sealed the message in an envelope, he walked up and down the dining room. Pacing and fretting, he wore out the night When the light of a new day suddenly spread itself through the house as the servants opened the *kajangs*, it seemed to disperse his fears. Before the eye of his mind he thought of how fresh and bright Anthony Kenton would appear at the office, his strong lean face so vivid and honest, and his dark gray eyes so frank and eager to get on in business.

"He's going to need nerve for the job I set him at," said Pickard to himself. "Good thing I've got a stranger I can trust, without having to take any of the men in the office into my confidence. I've got to get out of this jam, and get out

quick, or Tsang and his crowd'll finish me off."

Haggard and spent, he had his bath and dressed for the day. Then he replaced the awning lashing that had been cut. The sight of them, severed by a blade as sharp as a razor roused in him a feeling that bordered on terror. But he did not want his servants to know what had happened; if they realized the truth of the menace hanging over the house they would flee.

He told the house boy that he would be away for a few days. It was no longer safe in the house; for having failed with the strangling cord, he felt sure that Tsang would bribe the servants into his service—and that meant poison. The only reason he had taken a chance at staying at home was to test what Tsang would attempt after the failure to poison the wine at the Café of Ten Thousand Sublime Hopes.

Now Tsang would stop at nothing. There was a fortune involved, a fortune in gold coin. And the life of the manager of Benjamin Anderson and Company weighed too lightly in the scales to balance the treasure which was within the reach of the long thin fingers of Tsang Hun Lin.

CHAPTER VI

THE SWEATED COIN

IN ORDER to avoid any possibility of having his messenger followed by spies in the service of Tsang, Pickard drove his automobile into the city, taking with him a Malay boy who slept in the garage and did odd jobs. He dropped the boy within a few doors of the address given by Anthony Kenton in Custom-house Street, keeping him under observation until the note was delivered.

In less than an hour after the delivery of the note, Kenton appeared at the offices of Benjamin Anderson and Company and was admitted at once to Pickard's private office.

"I came as promptly as I could, sir," said Kenton.

He saw that Pickard's face was pallid and drawn, and his eyes showed strain and loss of sleep. His gray hair was damp with perspiration, though the heat of the day had not yet set in, and the office was filled with cooling breezes off the river.

"I wish I'd slept the way you appear to have slept," said Pickard, as he pushed his cigaret case across his desk to the young man. "For a man in a room in a lodging house in your district, you look mighty fresh." He kept his eyes on Kenton's clean shaven and slightly tanned cheeks.

"It was hot last night," admitted Kenton. "As a matter of fact, I slept very little. There's a lot of noise in Custom-house Street, and I don't believe the chinks ever stop working."

"They don't," said Pickard with a smile. "But I'm glad you feel fit, because I sent for you to put you to work."

"You're mighty kind!" exclaimed Kenton heartily.

Pickard waved a deprecating hand.

"As things go around here, it's not much of a position. But it'll do to fill in—and let us have a chance to get acquainted. Do sit down."

Kenton took a chair opposite Pickard.

"I know that you saved my life," went on Pickard. "I'm better aware this morning of the obligation I'm under, than I was yesterday. But—I know just what I'm up against now."

Kenton opened his eyes and took the cigaret from his lips with an exclamation of surprise.

"You mean that you've found the chink who emptied the vial into your wine glass?"

"No, no!" said Pickard. "I wish I had. Not that it would make much difference. Now, when'll you be ready to go to work?"

"That's entirely as you say, sir. I'd like to know, of course, the department—"

"You'll handle manifests and look after the customs brokers, speaking generally. In time, I hope to push you ahead, as I find where you'll fit best and do best."

"I'm sure I can make good with manifests," said Kenton. "As to promotion, you may not be suited with me when you've had a chance to judge my abilities."

"I'll risk it," said Pickard. "I've told the chief clerk you'll be here Monday—at eight."

"It's a chance that any man would be glad to have, sir," said Kenton. "Certainly, I'd rather work for Benjamin Anderson and Company than many other houses I know. Their employees always have a good word for them. You know business houses have reputations as well as clerks." He smiled at his joke.

"Yes," agreed Pickard. "The company stands high out here, and if a man makes good with us, and comes to the attention of Mr. Anderson, senior, that man's practically fixed for a lifetime in a commercial career. I went to work for the company as a boy, but I've gone up steadily—sometimes I think too far and too fast for my abilities."

"I understand that this is the most important branch of the company outside the home office," said Kenton, "and if Benjamin Anderson knows his business—and we all agree that he does—you haven't been here for twenty years as the head, if you'll permit me to say it, as an ornament. Mr. Pickard, I heard about you in Swatow long before I thought you'd be giving me a place and I'll be proud to have you for my chief." He rose and picked up his sun helmet from the chair.

"DON'T go just yet," said Pickard, drawing from his keyring a small key. "I want to show you something, and tell you about a surprise party I had last night, almost as good as the affair at the Café of the Ten Thousand Sublime Hopes."

Kenton sat down again. He looked startled.

"You don't mean that they tried to poison you again, sir?"

"Not poison, but almost as good, if not better, as a method of getting rid of a man who happens to be troublesome."

"They tried to kill you?" Kenton was shocked at the idea.

"I'm going to need friends, and plenty of 'em," said Pickard. "And as you saved me once, there's no reason why I shouldn't tell you of the latest attempt. Of course, it's a matter I don't want the office force to know."

He glanced at the door, his voice low, as he put the key in the central drawer of his desk and drew out the silken cord he had found under the foot of his bed. He threw it on the desk, between them.

Kenton stared. He half stood, then bent forward and felt of the silky strands.

"What—is it—for?" he asked, a puzzled look in his eyes as he turned to Pickard.

"It's what you might call a fancy jumping rope," said Pickard with a laugh.

"Jumping rope?" Kenton now was plainly unable to follow Pickard's joking reference to the silken cord, and Pickard hastened to explain.

"Yes, that's what the Chinese say about it. You use it to jump out of this world into the next. It's a strangling cord."

Kenton drew away with a show of aversion for the rope.

"Is that what it is? Nice little souvenir! Where'd it come from?"

"Oh, I picked it up in my bedroom about two o'clock this morning, after I'd taken a shot at a husky chink who'd cut his way through my lashed awnings. He wanted *that* on my neck."

"They're still after you? Why, Mr. Pickard! They're out to kill you with a vengeance! Is it the Café gang who—"

"The same gang, but not the same man," said Pickard. "This one looked like a coolie. He was almost naked, and well muscled. He had no teeth. That's as much as I know. He got away, anyhow."

"Of course, you've notified the police, sir?"

"I don't want the police—or anybody else—in on this thing. It would start a lot of talk and hurt the company's business. And nobody'd want to come near

me, for fear of being assassinated along with me if the murderers strike again—as they will. I know you can be trusted. That's why I'm telling you."

"You were mighty lucky you didn't sleep soundly."

"I happened to wake at the right time. To tell the truth, I never expected anybody'd be able to get into my room. He had the knot through the loop and, Mr. Kenton—"he laughed grimly—"I wouldn't be here this morning, giving you a job."

"You're not going to take any more chances, I trust," said Kenton. "Guards in the grounds and in the house? And all the proper precautions that are needed to protect your life?"

Kenton's concern was heartily genuine.

"Nothing like that for me. I'm staying at the Bund Club until this business is cleared up. I don't mind telling you it's serious. If it hadn't been for a white moth and whistles on the river I might have been asleep at the critical moment. I was sorry I'd taken a shot at him, afterward. The electric lights were out, and for all I knew there might've been a dozen more Chinese on the veranda. If my servants had run away, I could have been trapped in spite of my gun, and finished off."

"The wires were cut?"

"Perhaps. My lights frequently fail. I didn't investigate this morning. I don't want to panic my servants. But the odd thing about it is that the lights didn't go out until my strangler was well inside the house. I'd left a globe burning on the veranda, and he had to pass under it to get to my window and cut the lashings of the awning. And that globe lit up quite a patch of lawn, and he had to pass that before he got to the veranda. If he was going to cut the light wires, why didn't he do it before he got to the house at all?"

Kenton thought a minute.

"Sure of your servants?"

"No, I'm not," said Pickard. "What chink can you be sure of, when there's bribery on a large scale? I'm convinced that plenty of money would be spent to put an end to me."

"I'd say some of the house boys monkeyed with the light wires," remarked Kenton.

"It's possible. I pretended that nothing of importance had happened. But, if they tampered with the house boys, it would be simpler to feed me poison than to help a strangler break in. Of course, I'll pitch the whole lot out on their necks before I go back to live in the house."

"Yes, I think that'd be safer, sir. Because there's something peculiar about the whole thing."

"And I had a half a dozen grass chairs out on the veranda leaning up against the lashed awnings, and that chap must have worked in the glare of the veranda light when he was cutting the lashings. I heard him, and the lamp was on in the library as he worked."

"Are you sure the police couldn't pick him up, on your description, and the fact that he has no teeth? He may have a record, may be known for other crimes in which he has used this cord, for instance. You know, the police generally know where to look for a criminal, when they know the methods he uses in his crimes."

Pickard held up an insistent hand.

"No police for me. And as for the coolie who brought *that* with him, he's only a tool for somebody higher up."

"I'm not privileged to ask whether or not you know who the man higher up is," ventured Kenton, "and I'm not asking, sir; but if you've got any idea at all—"

"Not the slightest. That is, I couldn't name anybody. As the local head of the company I've made enemies, of course—business enemies. If a Chinese thinks he's cheated in some little deal, he holds the top man in the concern responsible. And we do business with literally thousands of Chinese."

"Naturally that makes it difficult for you to know who's responsible for these attempts on your life, sir." Kenton picked up his sun helmet again.

"Are you sure you've got enough running money until your first pay day?" suggested Pickard. "You may need a new

outfit, or you may want to change your lodgings. I haven't settled with the chief clerk yet about your wages, but if you need an advance—"

Kenton grinned.

"Thanks, but I can stick through." He ran his hand into a pocket and drew out a gold coin. "With all your worries, it's mighty kind of you to think of it, but—that's my last piece of gold." He held out his hand and showed one of the twenty dollar gold pieces he had salvaged from under Tsang's machine early that morning.

Though the awnings were down low on the open window, the light from the river slanted into Pickard's eyes as he turned his head to look into Kenton's hand.

"Your last gold—"

He checked himself and bent closer to see the coin more clearly. His whole expression and attitude underwent a startling change. Trembling, he raised himself half out of his chair. He stared, and his jaw sagged. For a full minute he stood in a crouching position. Then his brown and sun tanned face turned ruddy, and he sat down abruptly. As rapidly as he had reddened, now he paled, and a frightened look appeared on his face. Of a sudden he had become a man who looked heartsick, miserable and stricken with a panic of terror.

"Man, man! Where did you get that—gold piece?" Then he stood up swiftly. "Shut that door—the latch, I mean! Make it fast, so it can't be opened!"

CHAPTER VII

THE PENCILED MESSAGE

KENTON hurried across the office and dropped into place a brass bolt which secured the door. Then he returned to Pickard.

"Why, what's wrong with the money, sir?" he asked.

Pickard made an effort to recover himself and conceal his feelings.

"Mr. Kenton," he said quietly, "you've blundered on to something that interests me tremendously. I thought for a minute—in this tricky light—that it was something else. But would you mind letting me see that twenty dollar piece?"

"Certainly, sir." He handed over the coin.

Pickard examined the gold piece.

"No, not at all what I thought it was, at first. But it's important, just the same. You can't recall, can you, where you got it?"

"Where? Why—let me—see—" Kenton was blinking and showing every evidence of a man attempting to search through his memory.

"You've come by it since you arrived in this port?" pressed Pickard.

"Oh, yes, I'm sure of that, sir."

"Then you got it in change. Have you changed a banknote since you've been here? I mean, outside of a bank, in your usual expenditures?"

"Yes, I did. I had a fifty."

"Remember where you changed it?"

Kenton shook his head.

"No, I can't say, off hand."

"You have no recollection of the transaction which resulted in getting this in change?"

"I changed three fifties since I arrived. Bought new clothes in order to look well when I looked around for a place. But I can't say that I got this in change where I bought some of my new outfit. You see, I'm a stranger here, sir, and I can't remember where I bought all my things. A suit here, and shoes there."

"Then you'd say you got this in a local shop?"

Kenton nodded prompt assent.

"Yes, sir. I can say for certain that I got this twenty in a shop."

"Ah! A Chinese shop?"

"Yes, sir. No doubt of that."

"I thought perhaps you might have come by it in some restaurant. Are you certain that you didn't get it yesterday in the Café of Ten Thousand Sublime Hopes?"

"I'm certain I didn't. I changed a small gold piece there. You see, sir, out of the three bills I changed, it would be

difficult to say that any particular merchant gave me this coin."

"But of the three shops you patronized, perhaps you can remember them all."

"Perhaps. I wouldn't want to say for sure. But I'll take a look around the shopping streets and try and place the merchants where I changed the bills."

"Happen to know how long you've had it?"

"Not long, sir. I paid another month's rent yesterday after I'd talked with you at the restaurant. But I can't understand what's wrong with the gold piece, sir— I hope it's all right. The police—"

"Nothing like that," Pickard put in quickly. "This money is good, so you've nothing to worry about. Of course, the police would like to know where such coins crop up from, but they never bother anybody that has one."

"But if it's good, why should the police be interested?" asked Kenton, looking puzzled.

"Take another look at it. As you pointed out yourself, it isn't old—or did you?"

Kenton carefully examined the coin again.

"It looks old—and the date shows it was minted this year. Still, it's worn smooth."

"Exactly!" exclaimed Pickard. "It's a new coin, and it's as smooth as if it had been in circulation for twenty years at least—and with hard usage, at that."

"It must have changed hands many times since it came from the mint," said Kenton. "I hope I can pass it."

Pickard smiled, though a trifle wanly.

"I will be glad to take it, and give you another twenty." He reached into a drawer of his desk and brought out a handful of change and gold pieces. He selected a twenty dollar piece and handed it to Kenton in exchange for the one they had been discussing.

"Say!" said Kenton. "This one is the same date and it looks as if it had just come from the mint."

Pickard smiled.

"Yes, I'd say it's from the same batch. And if you run into any more of these smooth ones—"

"I'll keep my eye out the next time, Mr. Pickard," said Kenton hastily. "No more smooth ones for me. Besides, I'll not be likely to have many until I've had a pay day."

"I forgot that was your last twenty. I didn't mean to embarrass you. But the point I want to make is this—take any of the smooth ones that are offered. Let me know where you get 'em. Bring 'em to me as promptly as possible. I'll appreciate it as a favor, I assure you. You see, I'm on the lookout for the stuff, but what's the most important thing about it, I'll want to know where you get this money."

"But I don't quite understand, if I'm not taking too much of your time. You say it's good, that the police are interested, and yet you'd like to have more of these smooth gold pieces."

"No, I don't want more of these smooth ones. I want to know where they come from. And I'll be glad to explain. To begin with, I happen to know that the shipment of gold which brought the coins with this date into the country, arrived less than a month ago. And they were all new, just from the mint. Yet here I have a coin of the shipment which I got from you, and it is more worn down than it would be after years of hard use in trade. And it's especially bright, as well as smooth. That means it has been worked on in the last few days."

"WORKED ON? What do you mean, sir?"

"It's been sweated."

"Sweated?"

"Yes. It's an old trick, particularly among the Chinese. This piece you gave me has been sweated hard and fast, then put back into circulation. In the early days the chinks used to shake gold coins in pillow slips for hours at a time. They'd get a little dust. The shaking cut down the weight of the coins, as this has been cut down, and showed a profit to the

sweaters, who were careful not to sweat off so much gold that the coin would be damaged for ordinary use and refused. These last few months, maybe a year, gold coins are being sweated by a new process, an up-to-date process, and on a wholesale scale, as you might say. Thousands of gold coins have been ground down like this sample I got from you."

"Then it must be short weight."

Pickard nodded.

"It is."

"Would a bank take it?"

"They might. But it's a serious matter for the banks, though it's more of a nuisance than anything else. But here's the trouble: the banks have to weigh all coins they accept that are smooth, and this weighing takes extra work and time."

"Does it cause you much trouble?"

"Yes, it does, in a way. We handle a lot of gold coin. We pay thousands of Chinese workers with it, and we buy products for export with gold coin, getting a better discount than if we paid with currency. Chinks like to handle the yellow metal."

Kenton smiled.

"I don't wonder they do, when they can shave extra dividends from it. But who does the sweating?"

"Chinese, of course."

"They must make a big profit, if they handle enough coin."

"Now you've struck what's got everybody puzzled," said Pickard. "The profit is very small. We can't understand how the sweaters make enough to pay them for the trouble. But the yellow man is always mysterious. He can get rich on a margin of profit that'd put a white man in the poorhouse. He will figure in terms of a tenth of a cent, where the white man figures in dollars."

"Yet you said, sir, that sweating is being done wholesale, and by some modern method. Would it be done on a large scale for a trifling pittance of profit?"

Pickard laughed quietly.

"There are many theories. Some men will tell you that the bit of gold sweated from coins is mixed with brass filings, and the dust used in trade with uncivilized natives of various islands. The natives think the dust is all gold. But I doubt the idea. Natives don't want gold dust; they want goods."

"Perhaps the profit is greater than you realize, sir," said Kenton. "The Chinese are sharp witted people, and some day the secret will come out."

"Sharp witted!" exclaimed Pickard. "When you've been on this side as long as I have, you'll know 'em better. Our wits get sharpened in dealing with them. They've been grappling for centuries with the problem of making a living in an overpopulated, starvation country, and their brains are well whetted with—"

There was a knock at the door. Pickard checked his words and listened. Again the knock was repeated.

"Wait a minute," said Pickard.

He rose and went to the door, lifted the bolt and looked out. An envelope was passed in, and Kenton saw a yellow hand and a black sleeve. Pickard took the envelope, closed the door and bolted it. He returned to his desk, scanning the envelope with curious eyes, turning it over and over, almost with suspicion.

"Will you excuse me a minute," he said. "I'll just glance at this."

"Certainly. I've overstayed my time, anyhow."

He swung away from the desk.

Pickard, having run the blade of a paper cutter through one end of the envelope, extracted a single sheet of folded letter paper, and inside he found a message written on the back of a cable blank. As he read the words in the message, he suddenly wavered as if he had lost his balance, and swayed over into his chair. He let the message flutter to the floor, and put both hands to his head as he leaned over the desk.

"God help me!" he breathed half aloud. "This means—"

He lifted his head and with a quick movement reached into an open drawer of his desk. Kenton turned, to see Pickard with a revolver.

CHAPTER VIII

CUMSHAW

KENTON sprang swiftly around the desk and grasped Pickard's hand, and the next minute he wrested the revolver from the grasp of his employer.

"You can't do that, Mr. Pickard!" said Kenton quietly, as he stood with the revolver behind the older man. "You may be in a jam, but I doubt that you need to shoot yourself." Kenton walked round to the other side of the desk and stood watching.

Pickard's face was pallid, and his lips worked over his teeth in twitching convulsions. His eyes were fixed on nothing in a dull stare.

"What's gone wrong, sir?" asked Kenton. "If I've seen what you just tried to do—with this—you might as well take me into your confidence."

Pickard could not speak. Kenton slipped the revolver into a back pocket and brought a glass of water. Then, seeing a bottle of brandy in a little cabinet with an open door beside Pickard's chair, he spiked the water with the liquor and offered it.

Pickard drank. He leaned back in his chair, shielding his eyes from the light reflected upward from the river through the awnings as he lay twisted away from the desk. Presently he sighed heavily—more of a groan than a sigh.

Kenton picked up the cable blank and laid it on the desk so the writing, which had so stricken the man in the chair that he had sought to end his life, was on top. In a few minutes Pickard lifted the paper with listless fingers and again examined the message. Kenton let his eyes fall to the paper. He saw that the message was neither typed nor written, but each letter was drawn in capitals, crudely, to resemble print. An office copying pencil had been used. Though the words were upside down to him from where he stood, Kenton did not attempt to read them—for he already knew them. Under his dictation, Yates had put the words down on the paper.

"That paper," almost whispered Pickard, "means that my business career—my character—is ruined. I'm at the end of my rope."

Kenton was silent for a minute.

"Why not talk it over, sir? If you trust me I might be able to be of some help."

Pickard roused himself and coughed harshly. He swung in the chair and with shaking hands lifted the bottle of brandy to his lips. He took a deep drink and slammed the bottle down on the desk.

"Help! Man, I'm wiped out—and disgraced!"

Kenton leaned forward over the desk and slapped it with his hand.

"Don't say that! It sounds absurd. No man is finished until he thinks so. If you've crashed as hard as you say you have, you won't be able to give me a job. All right. Then I can talk frankly. I want nothing for myself. But I'll stick by you, job or no job, crash or not, disgrace or not. But don't quit now, Mr. Pickard. Don't lose your head—for that note!"

Pickard smiled sadly.

"You're game, kid!" he said gratefully. "But you don't know how bad it all is, and there's nothing you can do. I'm caught in a trap—I've betrayed my boss—and disloyalty's the rottenest thing a man can pull. I didn't mean to let the boss down, but I took a chance and I've lost. Run along, young man! It'll do you no good to be known as a friend of mine."

"Nonsense!" said Kenton. "You've tried to put me on my feet when I needed a job. I don't want to pry into your affairs, but if there's any way I can be of help—"

Pickard shook his head wearily.

"Nobody can do anything. I'm short some two hundred thousand dollars of company funds—and in gold coin."

"Short! Two hundred thousand dollars—and in gold!" gasped Kenton.

"I'm an embezzler in the eyes of the world. A thief! I risked it! I let it out

of my hands, and it's gone!" Pickard dropped his gray head into his hands and swayed back and forth in his chair.

KENTON sat down. Pickard got up and began pacing the room. He stared down at the rugs. He beat his hands together. He breathed like a man suffering agonies but trying to control his anguish.

"It's hopeless, Kenton," he said presently, staring out under the awning to the river. "I can't ever face old Benjamin Anderson. He's so square himself that he wouldn't understand how a man could do what I've done. He'd be just, but he'd be severe. He'd give me a run through hell in my bare feet!"

"A loss of a fifth of a million won't ruin the company."

"It's carfare to them, and ruin for me. Thank God, I've no wife or children! But I tell you I can't face the big boss!"

"Now don't lose your head, sir. Have you been gambling?"

"No. Not as you mean. I'd been making side money—*cumsha*—what the Chinese call graft or squeeze pidgin—shady business."

"Then the chinks got you! Just what was the game, sir?"

"Letting 'em have gold coin to sweat, the money back and a percentage of the profits," said Pickard.

"Playing with Chinese sweaters!" exclaimed Kenton. "But you told me that the profits must be trifling. That there was small margin and you could not possibly figure a gain that would be worth interest to anybody but a chink!"

"I misled you in both statements," admitted Pickard. "I lied, Kenton. I have made a lot of money out of sweating, and now I've been cleaned out of a fortune that doesn't belong to me." He spoke calmly now, but with bitterness against himself.

"But how did they get it from you?" asked Kenton. "And who got it?"

"A chink named Tsang Hun Lin. I've been playing along with him a couple of years, and he always delivered the goods. But now I see his game. He waited until he had a fortune in his hands and then jumped."

"How in heaven's name could he get two hundred thousand dollars in gold coin and skip?" asked Kenton. "Surely, the police—"

"How can I go to the police and tell them that I've put a fortune of gold into the hands of a Chinese to be sweated? You hardly credit the statement yourself—it sounds like madness! And it is! I was crazy as hell! The first inkling I got that anything was wrong was yesterday, from you. I knew then what I was up against."

"How could I tell you, sir?"

"You saved me from poison. It was Tsang who was behind that. Just as he was behind that strangler who got into my room this morning. With all that gold belonging to the company in his hands, Tsang wanted to wipe me out. He failed, so he has jumped."

Kenton lit a cigaret and thought for a moment.

"Yes, I can see now why they wanted to get you. But I don't grasp the astounding situation involved, when a man in your position will give a Chinese a fortune and expect to get it back. Especially, in an illegal transaction, where he can pocket the money, and the victim can not bring any charges without being involved himself."

"I can well understand how you're puzzled, Kenton. But at least once in his lifetime, I suppose, every man makes a cursed fool of himself. Sometimes it doesn't matter much, but in my case it does. I should have known the chink would get me in the end. But he played me cleverly, and I was the usual stupid fool who falls for the simple game."

"You must have had confidence in him, to hand him a fifth of a million, in gold that was in you charge."

"Yes, I did have confidence. That's all the swindler needs. I began a couple of years ago with a thousand in gold of my own. Tsang sweated it in an old ruin of a machine shop down near the waterfront.

He brought me back my thousand, and a hundred in cash besides. The thousand in gold coin was polished, but it was still good. Of course, ten per cent. in a week, and your money back, is alluring. I changed the sweated thousand for new gold—and went on. Tsang always came back, and I put larger sums in his hands. I lived beyond my means, considering my salary. But the wealth poured in from Tsang."

"Then why risk the company's money?"

"Two reasons. I poured my money out to relations back home. And it was only because the company paid off and purchased with gold coin that I could make the profits I did from Tsang. I had shipments of gold coming here steadily. I didn't have to take sweated gold to the banks and ask for new gold, or gold good enough to be sweated. I swapped the sweated coin back to the company and paid the salaries and bills with it. Then I found I'd killed the goose."

"They always do," said Kenton. "But why do it in this case?"

"So much sweated gold was going into circulation that the company changed their method of paying. The last shipment in gold, two hundred thousand dollars, arrived last week. I turned it over to Tsang. He has disappeared."

KENTON looked out through the window.

"It was a wide chance, when the business community was beginning to get alarmed over the sweating."

"No, it wasn't a chance, as I saw it," declared Pickard. "Tsang has had half as much at a time before, and always returned it, with the profit, or dividend. Of course, I've had the returned coins weighed, and I couldn't for the life of me see how he got as much as ten per cent. out of it. The coins had not lost that much weight, by several grains. It all seemed incredible, as I told you in the first place. But chinks have their own way of working things, and I assumed that the sweating was only a blind. It was hinted that Tsang owned a big gambling house, and was making money in other ways. In that case he needed capital, and the money I poured through his hands, appeared to keep him going."

"But he must have been operating the same way that he did with you, with others," suggested Kenton.

"Sure! I know now why two men in high executive position like myself, killed themselves in the past year or so. Tsang had wiped them out financially, and they had no comeback. I never suspected the truth until now, or rather, until you knocked the wine out of my hand in the Café of Ten Thousand Sublime Hopes."

"Then, likely, he's jumped with more than yours now." Kenton leaned forward, as if eager to hear the reply.

Pickard waved his hands in a hopeless gesture.

"Why not? He's probably got away with a million or two. Nobody can know and they never will. The poor suckers who are caught, like myself, won't be likely to admit that they've been suckers."

"And millions in gold!" breathed Kenton. "It does seem incredible. But that chink has been playing a crafty game and playing for big stakes."

"Chink!" exclaimed Pickard. "I'll bet there's a whole syndicate of 'em. That's the trouble. If I had Tsang to deal with by himself, and a small gang about him, I might do something; but Tsang is only one, and behind him some of the most powerful Chinese in the city, without a doubt."

"They must have power, if they've been trimming business men so badly that they've had to kill themselves. And who knows how many have been ruined, or swindled in some degree, who have never done or said anything about it."

Kenton surveyed the ceiling as he leaned back in his chair and talked. The possibilities of Tsang's trickery in earnings seemed to fascinate the young man.

"They've played their cards well," said

Pickard. "Nobody lost anything, you see. There appeared to be no risk. The gold came back into my hands promptly. Why, yesterday, when you saw me at the Café, Tsang was there in a room waiting for me, and had some of the gold in a bag, returning it."

"But you said you were waiting for him," said Kenton, as if there was something in the conflicting statements which seemed important.

"Yes, I did. I always said that. As a matter of fact, Tsang never arrived after I did. He was always there first, for some reason or other."

Kenton lighted a fresh cigaret and pondered.

"There's one point that puzzles me. If there's so much sweated gold, why did that one coin you took from me, startle you so when you saw it in my possession?"

"That's easy," said Pickard. "Tsang never circulates sweated gold. And that coin being one of the last shipment to arrive, I knew it couldn't be in circulation unless something was wrong. I always put the money out. Your coin told me that Tsang must have been putting my gold into circulation for two or three days. Yet that pigskin bag in the corner is supposed to have the first lot of sweated money bearing that date."

"Yes," said Kenton. "It looks as if knowing that he intended to jump on you, Tsang put your money into circulation, or some of it."

"He never intended to give it back; I can see that now," said Pickard. "That's why he tried to kill me with poison and the rope. All I can say now is that I wish he'd finished the job in the Café. It would have been simpler."

"Look here!" exclaimed Kenton. "How can you be sure he's gone? It may be part of his game?"

Pickard looked up swiftly.

"Yes, that's possible."

"What was the message you got?" demanded Kenton.

Pickard passed over the sheet of paper with the crudely formed letters marked in pencil. Kenton read:

YOU HAVE DEEN DEALING WITH TSANG. HE LOADED HIS SCHOONER WITH CASKS LAST NIGHT AND SAILED EARLY THIS MORNING. DOES THAT MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU? A FRIEND OF QUONG LOO AND AN ENEMY OF TSANG HUN LIN. YOU WILL FIND HIM AT KAWAL.

"Where's Kawal?" asked Kenton.

"Kawal Island—a Chinese resort some five hundred miles to the southward of here. A white man has little chance to go there and do anything. All Chinese criminals flee to Kawal and hide there, and they are aided by the worst lot of crooks the world has ever known. A fugitive who gets to Kawal—Chinese fugitive—is shipped away secretly, and he's never seen again," said Pickard.

"LET'S go to Kawal," suggested Kenton, as he threw his cigaret into a brass tray. "Now that I haven't any job, I'd like to try my hand on that crowd at Kawal."

"Now—you're crazy!" said Pickard. "There are probably a thousand men at Kawal who'd cut your throat the minute you walked up the beach if you went looking for Tsang."

"Can't you get a few men together, who can shoot straight, and give Tsang a fight?"

"No, and I don't intend to. I'd have to take a lot of men in the company into my confidence. I'd look fine, chasing a chink who's skipped with money I'm responsible for, and when he's caught have to admit that I was in on a crooked deal with him."

"It would be a lot nicer than shooting yourself and having the company lose the money, too. Anyhow, you'd have some satisfaction if you checked Tsang. You'd be saving others from getting into the same mess, and that's something, sir. If you kill yourself, Tsang and his crowd can come back and start all over again."

Pickard got up and walked about again.

"There's something in the idea, at that," he admitted, "but I can't raise an army to go off on any such a—"

"I'm a good shot," said Kenton. "I'm rooming with a chap named Mike Yates

who was a machine gunner during the war. Mike's out of a job, just as I am. And you've got plenty of shipping under your control. If we could catch that schooner before she gets to Kawal, we could make things lively for Tsang. Mike Yates with a machine gun on the deck of our vessel would have a lot of fun. Maybe we'd both get jobs with the company when we got back here with the gold."

Pickard stepped to a telephone.

"Get Captain Bogue of the steamer *Tung-hai* at once. He's ready to sail for Singapore. I want him here in my office as quick as he can make it. Yes, send the car."

CHAPTER IX

THE SKIPPER OF THE *TUNG-HAI*

PICKARD hung up the telephone and turned to Kenton.

"I'm going to take a chance on catching Tsang before he gets to Kawal. One of our tramps, the *Tung-hai*, is ready to sail for Singapore, or should be, before dark. And Kawal's on the way to Singapore, anyhow, not far off the course. I presume I'll have to take the skipper, Bogue, into my confidence now."

"Don't tell him anything until we're at sea," advised Kenton.

"That's probably the best thing to do, but I'll have to tell him sometime."

"All right. But if you're wise, you'll say nothing about Kawal to anybody until you have to. There might be a leak, or some legal angle, or Bogue might balk if he knows we intend to attack a vessel at sea."

Pickard thought for a minute, and lighted a cigar with nervous fingers.

"That's true. And Tsang's friends here might send a swift vessel to warn him. But Bogue—well, he'll do anything for me. I gave him command, and he's one of the youngest of our skippers. He'd been in some kind of a jam before he joined the company—some fool gun running business—but I gave him a chance and he made good."

"You mean that this skipper was in trouble with the authorities?" asked Kenton.

"Yes. He was in the black books of the shipping companies. He swore to me that he didn't know there was anything wrong about the ship he was involved with, but it finished him with the big companies. He was second mate in an old tub run down Amoy way by a Chinese exporting company when I hired him as a mate in our company. I always liked him."

"Then he's just the man you want, if he's been in a shady deal before," said Kenton. "He'll have to keep his mouth shut."

Pickard resumed his excited walking up and down.

"I'm not so sure Captain Bogue'd have anything to do with a deal that'd bring him before the authorities. We've got to have some excuse for capturing a schooner and killing some of the crew. And we can't keep our own Chinese crew quiet after anything like that."

"Are you going to worry about Tsang and his crew? Or do you want to get that gold back and straighten your affairs with the company?"

Pickard stopped in his tracks.

"Kenton, but for you, I'd be a dead man now. The prospect I faced was more than I could stand, and I lost my head." He stepped over to Kenton and grasped his hand. "I'll never forget the way you've bolstered me up—and you're right! I've got to get that gold back, even if I force Bogue into what'll look like piracy and murder!"

"Now you're talking!" said Kenton. "And more than yourself is involved, sir! If Tsang can wipe you out, he can go on with his game of ruining others. You've got to stamp out this gang of swindlers and do your talking to the authorities afterward. You're justified in what you do—your life has been attempted—and don't you believe the company will back you clear through on this thing? Old man Anderson'll be tickled pink."

"I back away from telling him what I got myself into," said Pickard. "That'll be the hardest part."

"Why tell him at all, then?" argued Kenton. "Tsang has gold belonging to others. When you've got yours in your hands, who needs to know you were involved?"

"Kenton, if I get that gold back—" he slapped his hands together and shook them—"I'll tell Benjamin Anderson the truth!"

"Fine!" said the young man. "Now let's get down to cases! Yates will need machine guns, at least two, in case of jams. How can we get those aboard at once?"

"All our vessels carry machine guns," said Pickard. "A standing order in the company since one of our freighters got into trouble with pirates up around Bias Bay."

"All right, sir. Then if you and Yates and myself sail as passengers, this Captain Bogue needn't know a thing, until you're ready to tell him to change course for Kawal. His orders then will let him out of any trouble with the authorities. And you can tell him that the schooner skipped with company property. He won't need to see the gold. We'll just put a line aboard that schooner and tow her into port."

PICKARD, himself again, got on the telephone and began giving orders to heads of departments in godowns and docks and all the details that were to be held waiting or attended to during his absence. He reported that he was sailing for Singapore in the *Tung-hai.*

"Perhaps I could get a couple of men out of the company who are former soldiers, and can be trusted," he suggested to Kenton when he had attended to the most pressing affairs.

Kenton shook his head.

"We can handle that schooner, with men in the crew, I'd say. There won't be much to do when Yates has swept Tsang's decks clear, I can tell you that, sir."

Pickard nodded.

"Perhaps you're right. The less I have to say here in port, the better. But who the devil sent me that note?" He picked up the message, put on his glasses, and examined the scrawled capitals.

"Who brought it to the door? A Chinese?"

"Yes, but he was one of our own office boys. A stranger would never get to my door here."

"May I have a look at it?" asked Kenton.

Pickard passed the paper over and Kenton studied it.

"Who's Quong Loo?"

"That fat man who came in the room, the owner of the Café of Ten Thousand Sublime Hopes."

"Oh, yes, I remember, sir. Well, you've no reason to worry about somebody who's friend enough to warn you that Tsang has left Kawal, have you?"

"Only on the grounds that the person who sent that message must know I've been dealing with Tsang, and that means somebody in this city knows my secret. It's not a pleasant idea, you know."

"It would be a lot more unpleasant if the person who sent this message kept the information to himself or tried to make you pay for the information."

"I'll admit as much," said Pickard.

"It's somebody who's in the same boat with you, I'll bet," declared Kenton. "This man knows some of his gold has gone with Tsang, and knowing you might do something to protect yourself, he has tipped you off. And what does he mean by 'his schooner'? Is it possible that Tsang owns a schooner?"

"Yes. A small two masted vessel, named the *Rusa.* He bought her in Singapore and has been suspected of running opium with her, though she had been tied up in the canal below the bridge for better than a year."

"Then it'll be very simple to make sure that the *Rusa* has sailed. If she hasn't, this note may mean that Tsang is playing horse with you."

"By George!" said Pickard, reaching for the telephone again, "I'd better get on the job! The marine department—" he hesitated. "No," he declared, "I don't

want any information to pass into Chinese hands that I'm checking up on the *Rusa*. We'll take a look at the bridge, when we go down to board the *Tung-hai*—and you can find out for me, if we don't see the *Rusa* in the canal."

"That's right," agreed Kenton. "You've got to play a canny game from now on, so—"

THERE came a knock at the door. Pickard opened it to a Chinese boy from an outer office. He announced that Captain Bogue was ready to come in.

In a minute a brisk man in a white uniform jacket, wearing a cap bearing the house flag of Benjamin Anderson and Company entered. The four gilt bands on the sleeves of his jacket told that he was in command of a vessel owned by the shipping company.

"Hello, Mr. Pickard!" he said quietly, as he took off his cap, and glanced at Kenton casually.

Bogue was a young man, but looked older than his years by reason of the hard lines in his face and his weather beaten and sun browned skin. He had a cold gray eye that moved slowly.

Pickard shook hands.

"When do you sail, Skipper?"

"About four o'clock, sir." He laid down a packet of papers and wiped his face.

"I'm sailing with you, Skipper."

"That so? Glad to have you along."

"And Mr. Kenton here—he's just entered the employ of the company—is sailing with me. And a man named—"

"Yates—Mike Yates," said Kenton.

Captain Bogue turned and offered his hand to Kenton. They shook, and their eyes met without any sign that they had ever encountered each other before.

"So you're in the family, eh?" said Bogue. "Well, Benjamin Anderson and Company always treat their people right, I can tell you that. And Mr. Pickard here, he shoots as square as the Old Man himself."

"That's worth a cigar, Skipper," said Pickard, with a grin.

"Any special orders, sir?" asked Bogue, striking a match.

"In a way, yes," said Pickard. "I don't want anybody to know I'm sailing. Going on mighty private business. We'll be aboard at the last possible minute. But don't say a word about it."

"I've got a mouth that shuts hard, and I'll be ready to heave short at four o'clock, sir."

"I'll go to the customs house first, and we'll leave there in a company launch. I'll go to some of the near by lorchas in the bay, and then I'll drop over to your anchorage. I'll tell the launch to come back in an hour, so show no sign that you're about to sail until that launch goes away."

Captain Bogue picked up his cap and gathered his papers in a case under his arm.

"I understand, sir. A quick slip."

Pickard went to the door with him, leaving Kenton standing at the desk.

"See you later, Captain," called Kenton, with a nod.

"I'll be ready for you and glad to have a party along," called Bogue, as he passed through the door.

Pickard returned to his desk and sat down.

"That's fixed," he said. "But I hope you realize that you're taking a chance of getting into a fine mess of danger before we get back to port. If we catch the *Rusa* we can look for a good fight from Tsang and the lot of cutthroats he'll have with him."

Kenton smiled modestly.

"Most people will do a lot of fighting when there's a million or so in gold in the pot, eh? It'll be as pretty a little game as I ever sat in, Mr. Pickard."

CHAPTER X

KENTON'S STRANGE STORY

"I THINK Captain Bogue suspects that there is something out of the ordinary going on," said Kenton.

He was leaning against the rail of the quarterdeck of the *Tung-hai*. An hour

before they had dropped the land, and a fat moon was just above the horizon.

Pickard swung in his hammock under the awning as the steamer heeled lazily to the swells of the China Sea. The evening was pleasantly cool after the great heat of the city, for the southwest monsoon was a gentle beam wind. The smoke from the funnel swept to port, making a long wavering shadow over the moonlit sea.

"What makes you think that?" Pickard yawned noisily, for he had been napping since dinner in the little saloon. "We got away according to schedule, and I don't see what he'd notice that'd make him suspicious."

"Can't exactly put my finger on it," said Kenton, "but he isn't quite sure of what's in the wind. If you noticed, he had mighty little to say to me at dinner, and he barely said anything to Yates."

Pickard sat up and lighted a cigaret.

"That's to be expected. All skippers are a little nervous when the boss is aboard. You and Yates are strangers, and you are in the employ of the company—a new man, strong enough with me to be traveling on business with me. And Yates—he's hardly what you'd call a man accustomed to dining with skippers and our sort."

Kenton chuckled.

"Yes, I know what you mean. Yates is more accustomed to eating out of a mess kit, and he suddenly finds himself a first class passenger. But we didn't bring him for eating manners, sir—but wait until you see him pet a machine gun into doing just what he wants."

"To tell the truth," said Pickard, "Captain Bogue knows that I haven't told him everything. It makes him a little nervous, perhaps."

"How much have you told him, sir?"

"Said to keep a good watch for a two masted schooner that's in charter to the company, somewhere ahead, named the *Rusa*. He said he'd noticed her passing out to sea this morning. I told him we'd have to go off our course a little to find her, and he just nodded without saying anything."

"That's all right, then," said Kenton. "I knew there was something on his mind."

Pickard tossed his cigaret over the side.

"He's a little annoyed at losing time by getting off his course. He's had bad luck on his turn around in port this time."

"What happened, sir?"

"Cargo delays. Was four days loading, when he should've been finished in two. We had a few words about it, and I was a bit sharp with him. So he's a little cold over the idea of chasing a schooner for me to give her a message. And I think he knows I'm lying about the *Rusa* being in company charter. She's a shady boat, and I suspect he's heard from customs men that she's supposed to have skipped to sea. She's been fishing around the bay lately, and she got away without clearance. Bogue's probably afraid I'm in on some deal that wouldn't stand up under inquiry—and he's had all the inquiries he wants." He dropped back in the hammock. "I'm pretty well flattened out, Kenton."

"You'd better get all the sleep you can, sir. When we overhaul the schooner, you'll want to be wide awake."

"All right. I'll try to sleep some more. You might call me in an hour."

"All right, sir," said Kenton, and he went down the ladder to the well deck, moved forward, and climbed to the little saloon deck. He went to the port side and, passing the open door of the social hall, looked in. He had left Yates there, reading. But the young man had disappeared. Kenton went on to the bridge ladder and climbed it.

A BIG Chinese was at the wheel, and on the starboard wing of the bridge, Mr. Landon, the mate, stood peering over the canvas apron. Kenton stood for a moment and looked out over the foredeck. One of the Chinese crew was blowing a reed flute on the forecastlehead, playing the same little plaintive tune over and over. The wash of the seas overside, the throb of the engines below, and the hum

of the funnel stays made a lulling medley of rhythm.

Kenton turned to the little charthouse abaft the wheel. The door was closed, but through the open ports he could see the white top of Captain Bogue's cap askew on his head, as he bent over a chart.

Without knocking on the door, Kenton went in. Bogue lifted his head and peered over his shoulder. He nodded, put down his pipe and closed both open ports.

"Seen anything of Yates?" asked Kenton.

"Yes. He's in the lamp room, cleaning up one of the machine guns. But nobody knows he's there, and he's keeping pretty quiet. Where's Pickard?"

"Aft, in the hammock, napping. He had a hard night and the day's been rather exciting for him. I wonder he's stood up under the strain. I had a tough time with him for a while."

Bogue pushed his cap to the back of his head and dropped back into the folding chair before the chart table. He relighted his pipe, thoughtfully.

"I've had a hard day myself. When I got clear of that office I broke out in the prickly heat."

"Made you nervous, eh, to be introduced to me?"

"I didn't expect to find you there, of course. And I felt all the time that Pickard knew we were not strangers."

"Nonsense!" said Kenton. "He was thoroughly fooled, Skipper."

"Look here, I'm no blooming actor, Mr.—"

"Kenton!" the younger man hastened to put in.

Bogue lifted his shoulders.

"You see! We're on thin ice. And the worst of it was, you told me I'd have to delay my loading. I had a tough time with Pickard about it. He was on my neck pretty hard about the delay."

Kenton smiled, with a queer twist to his lips.

"I heard of it. But you got away with it, so what's the difference?"

"Nothing much, unless he puts a bullet into me when he finds I'm playing your game. Damn it all, you said you'd be ready by my regular sailing time, and then you hold me up two days. I had holds full that I had to lie about. If any of Pickard's office jumpers had ordered the hatches off, I'd been caught in a nice jam. And your game'd been bilged."

"Don't worry, Skipper. The game's too big for that, and the cards are falling nicely. Put this over, and you won't have to ask Pickard for anything as long as you live. And as for his taking a shot at you, he's just as likely to take a shot at me. I'm the guy who's going to be under the guns when Pickard finds out just how I've fooled him. We've got to see that he's in no position to shoot anybody."

"He's likely to go off his head entirely when the showdown comes," said Bogue.

"You leave it to me, Skipper," persisted Kenton. "There's a fortune in this pot we're playing and we hold all the aces. This is no time to weaken. "You've got to go through with me, Bogue."

"Oh, it isn't any question of going through. But it's hard for me to put Pickard in such a hole. He gave me my start with the company, when I needed a new start rotten bad, and he's pushed me up to command, over the heads of older men in the service. It goes against my grain, and that's all there is to it. Poor devil!"

Kenton held up a determined hand and shook it at the skipper.

"Don't you worry about Pickard. He'd've blown his brains out, but for me, this morning, and we'd've lost out in more than one way."

"He's been under a terrible strain, of course. He acted as if he was off his head yesterday afternoon when he rode me again about being late loading."

"I know all that," said Kenton. "I've been watching him for weeks. The only thing that worried me was that he'd discover he was being watched and kill himself before I got my hands on that gold. And I was afraid that Tsang'd make his jump before I could get Pickard's confidence."

"How the devil did you manage to get

thick with him—and so quick? Why, he swears by you! Told me before dinner that you was a wonder."

KENTON grinned at the skipper, and waved a hand.

"Man, I played in luck, mostly. It was simple enough. He was on edge about Tsang, and I knew they were going to meet at a Café. I took that young chink that I brought down from Swatow with me, and we laid a nice trap for Pickard—and he walked into it with both feet. Naturally, I had him at a disadvantage, threw him off his guard while he was scared."

"I pass it to anybody who can throw Pickard off his guard and fool him the way you have," said Bogue. "He's one of the canniest men I know, and here you've got him eating out of your hand. How did you work it?"

"With my Swatow chink. I planted him in the café. When I gave a signal and jumped up, my chink jumped and ran, and I after him. He made for a launch I had waiting for him, and got away, of course."

"Why should that throw Pickard into a panic?" asked Bogue.

"Because his waiter had just brought him a glass of wine. I dashed into Pickard's private booth, and knocked the wine from his hand. I told him it had been poisoned—and believe me, he nearly threw a fit. He kept pretty good control over himself, but from that minute I led him around with a ring in his nose." Kenton grinned back at the astounded skipper.

"What if he'd killed Tsang?" asked Bogue.

"I thought of that, too. But Pickard wanted his gold back. I imagine he went after the old chink a trifle rough on the matter of the poison, and Tsang simply jumped a little quicker than he intended to. But by that time I knew enough about Tsang to know he'd head for Kawal, as I told you when you reached port."

"You run an awful chance that Tsang might've been killed by some of his own gang, didn't you?"

"Yes. But that danger existed at any time, with so much gold under his control. As a matter of fact, Tsang's skipping from his own higher-ups, as much as he's skipping from Pickard. He probably never told anybody that Pickard was going to make a row unless the gold came back at once, and Pickard must've read the riot act to Tsang after my poisoning stunt."

"How do you know that?"

"Because Tsang sent a strangler after Pickard that night."

Bogue gave a low whistle.

"But how did Pickard know that Tsang had jumped for Kawal? He must've been keeping close watch on the old chink."

Kenton shook his head.

"No, Pickard didn't seem to have any particular information. I had to tip him myself."

Bogue opened his eyes wide now.

"How could you tell him what you knew about Tsang, without having a suspicious knowledge about what was going on?"

"I had Yates write out a message that might've come from a chink, and my Swatow boy delivered it at the office while I was there. That was when Pickard went up in the air and pulled a gun on himself. Then I worked him around to a point where he decided to take the *Tung-hai* and go after Tsang. That's when he sent for you."

"My God! You've certainly been on thin ice!" said the skipper. "It was about all I could do to hold myself when I jammed into Pickard's office and found you in the employ of the company. I thought the game was up then."

"Who wouldn't walk on thin ice, with a fortune under our bows?" asked Kenton simply. "And with Benjamin Anderson, junior, in college in the United States, I had a pretty clear field with Pickard. He knows that young Anderson's due to arrive in a few months, and sit in as his assistant, and that's why he decided to make his big cleanup with Tsang before gold shipments were stopped and old Anderson's son got on the job."

"You've said something now," agreed Bogue. "It was his last chance for a cleanup with any shady business."

"And ours," said Kenton. "If we pull this off, Bogue, we're fixed solid. Ain't I right?"

"You know more about that than I do," said Bogue. "But how much has Tsang got in that schooner?"

"Two hundred thousand of the company gold, and probably as much more than Tsang had in hand from other fools who'd trusted him with gold coin. I'd say roughly a half a million."

"Whew!" said Bogue. "What'll we do if the crew gets on to the fact that we're handling that kind of stuff aboard here?"

"Why let 'em know? It's all packed in small casks, and if we put a line aboard the schooner, we can tow her any old place we want."

"We can tow her, yes. If your man Yates doesn't tear her open at the water line, or below, when he cuts loose with his machine gun."

"You leave that to Mike. He knows his business." Kenton stood up. "Then we're all set, eh, until we get alongside the *Rusa?*"

"We are, if Pickard doesn't find out what we're up to. I'm not so sure the mate won't ask Pickard questions about you before we're ready for the big blow-off."

"Why should Landon ask Pickard questions?" demanded Kenton, showing concern for the first time since the conversation began.

"Because Landon told me he thinks he's seen you before somewhere."

"Holy mackerel!" whispered Kenton. "No!"

"Yes," insisted Bogue. "He can't place you, but he's got a memory like a bloodhound, Mr. Landon has."

"I CAN well understand he's got all of that! It was more than four years ago that he saw me, when I sailed from Hong Kong in the old *Sung-kiang.* He was second mate in her at the time, for the trip. But there were a lot of passengers aboard and I never spoke to him, that I can remember."

"Just the same, you stuck in his mind."

Kenton thought for a few minutes.

"Anyway, Landon couldn't do much damage to us now, even if he did tell Pickard something was wrong. But, of course, just at this time, I don't want Pickard to get the slightest tip of what the game is aboard here."

"No, you can't tell what he'd do," said Bogue. "Might go clean off his head and we'd have to lock him up. I've got the big room off the social hall ready, in case we have to brig him. And he's awful jumpy. We've got to watch him close. The door of that room is extra strong and there's a big lock on it that can't be monkeyed with from the inside." He held up a brass key that he had fished from a jacket pocket.

"On a pinch, couldn't we trust Mr. Landon?"

Bogue shook his head.

"I wouldn't chance it with this sort of thing. He knows I've been in a gun running game, just as Pickard does, and Landon regards me as somebody that'll bear watching. He probably wouldn't believe me if I told him we had a schooner full of gold to pick up—and he'd spill the beans to Pickard."

"Then there's one thing we must remember. We can't let Pickard kill himself. We need to keep him alive for more reasons than one—the police, a lot of publicity all up and down the China coast, and a great hullaballoo in general."

"Oh, sure!" said Bogue. "Plenty know he sailed with us, and we can't have a lot of publicity whirled around on this business."

"All right, Skipper. Do your stuff with the key any time you think it's necessary, without waiting for me, if I'm not around. But, what about the gun he asked for?"

Bogue smiled.

"It's loaded, and sand in place of powder in the cartridges. Yates fixed that up for me right away."

"Then he can't blow a hole through us or himself," said Kenton. "I'd better get out of here, or Landon'll begin to step on the gas with his thinking machinery."

He moved toward the door, and Bogue threw open the ports he had closed.

But as Kenton stepped over the high sill of the door, he drew back, his head twisted in a listening attitude. Then he swiftly drew back inside again, and closed the door.

"It's Pickard, I'd say, coming up to the bridge," he whispered.

Kenton sprang for the transom seat, threw his feet up on the bulkhead, and laid back on the cushion. They could hear the musical rasping of shoes on the iron rungs of the bridge ladder to starboard, as a man climbed slowly.

"That's right," whispered Bogue. "If you try to skip now and get down the other ladder, you'll have Landon shooting off his face. We've got to pretend that we didn't know Pickard was coming."

Captain Bogue turned to his shelf table and bent over the chart, pipe in mouth, his cap on the back of his head.

CHAPTER XI

PICKARD BEGINS TO THINK

PICKARD did not enter the charthouse at once. He remained on the bridge, and Kenton and Bogue heard him talking quietly with Landon. What they were talking about, neither Kenton nor the skipper could make out. The low voices came through the open ports in an unintelligible murmur, for both men faced ahead, looking over the bows. The wind through the starboard ports rustled the curtains, and the humming of the funnel shrouds mingled with all the other little noises of the vessel.

Kenton and Bogue then began a casual conversation, pretending that they were unaware of Pickard's whereabouts. And it was all of twenty minutes before they heard the mate's voice, saying—

"He's been in there some time, sir." Landon's voice seemed to be that of a man who did not expect to be overheard.

"All right, I'll see about it," said Pickard, with a trace of sharpness.

Then his feet came pounding along the bridge, brisk and businesslike. The next minute his hand rattled the ring knob of the door. He thrust it open and looked in.

"Oh, here's Mr. Pickard!" exclaimed Kenton, sitting up.

Bogue turned his head quickly, as if startled.

"Come in, sir."

"Thought you were still at your shut-eye," said Kenton, moving to the end of the transom seat to make room.

Pickard blinked at the gimbal lamp and screwed up his eyes. He closed the door behind him, a little doubtfully the others thought. He was in his shirt sleeves, a limp collar bent down under his heavy chin. His face was a trifle red. He took off his cap and ran the palm of a hand over his gray hair. There was a cigar gripped between his teeth, which gave his jaw a certain hardness. When he spoke his words seemed challenging.

"What're you two up to, anyhow?" he demanded. "Plotting against the whites or something?"

Captain Bogue blurted out a nervous laugh.

"We're a brace of desperate characters," he returned in a joking tone. He gave a pull on his pipe, found it had gone out, fumbled for matches in a back pocket, found one, broke it in striking it, and awkwardly burned his finger. "I'd say that Mr. Landon must've warned you."

The reference to the mate was plain. Captain Bogue was willing to let Pickard know that there had been some talk on the bridge that was more than a friendly chat.

Kenton was startled by Bogue's bluntness about the matter of Pickard's conversation with Landon. Bogue was ready for a break with Pickard, and saw that it might as well come then as later, all depending on how much suspicion the mate had injected into Pickard's thoughts.

"Thought I'd come up and help the

skipper run the ship, Mr. Pickard," said Kenton, in what he intended for casual banter in the same line with Pickard's questions as he entered.

Pickard laughed, but rather mechanically. He tilted his cap back on his head and sat down beside Kenton.

"Neither of you look very desperate, I'll admit." Pickard slapped Kenton on the knee. "If you did, you'd be dangerously chummy."

Bogue stared, plainly annoyed.

"Has it reached a point where my mate decides who I'll have up here? Or have you any objection to Mr. Kenton being here?" Bogue demanded. His look sped to Kenton's face to see how the other was taking Pickard's strange attempts at humor, if not worse.

"Hell, no, Skipper! You don't think I'm serious in what I just said, do you? Mr. Landon simply happened to mention, as I was leaving him out there on the bridge, that you and Kenton were 'gamming away like a couple of old whalers' as he called it. And I thought you two could stand a joke."

Kenton stood up abruptly.

"Perhaps you'd like to talk to the skipper by yourself, sir," he said.

"Sit down! Sit down!" cried Pickard affably. "I had a good nap, and thought I'd come up and have a look around. But if you two get mad just because I rag you a little, I—"

Again Bogue laughed, but mirthlessly.

"We got him that time, eh, Kenton? He comes in here to rag us, and when we turn the same kind of talk on him, he falls for it!"

"Not so bad," agreed Kenton, smiling. He returned to his seat beside Pickard and took a cigar from the hand of the latter.

"And you've had no sight of a schooner, Mr. Landon tells me, in spite of a sharp lookout," said Pickard, willing to let the joking drop.

"Not a sail so far," said Bogue. "And we've had a good clear cut horizon from sunup till now."

"I hardly expected you'd pick her up before this," said Pickard. "She ought to be pretty well ahead, with this wind."

"Will you have a look at the chart, sir?"

Pickard rose and stepped to the chart shelf, putting on his glasses as he went. Bogue winked at Kenton as a signal that there was no immediate danger of a break with Pickard.

"WHERE are we now?" asked the gray haired man, peering at the chart.

Bogue traced a light pencil line which showed the course. He stopped the pencil and said.

"About here, sir. The log has not been read for an hour or more, so this is approximate, and allows for current with an estimate on the turns of the propeller."

"Kawal Island on this chart?"

"Yes, sir, to the southward, here." He pointed out the spot.

Pickard straightened up and sat again beside Kenton.

"I'll tell you what I've decided to do, since I had my nap, Skipper," said Pickard. "I think you might as well get on a course for Kawal."

Captain Bogue turned on him in pretended astonishment.

"You—want to go—to Kawal!"

"Not necessarily, Skipper," said Pickard, as he snapped his spectacle case shut, "but that schooner I want to speak is going to stop there, and I've decided to keep on after her. It's important. We'll catch her before she gets to Kawal, of course. Shape a course such as would bring you where a sailing vessel would be likely to go." He lifted one white shod foot over a knee, and with a glance at Kenton, went on. "I don't wonder you're a bit surprised, Captain. I didn't tell you everything when I came aboard. It was a matter which required discretion, and I wanted to make sure that none of the crew while in port had any inkling of where I was going in the *Tung-hai*. I wanted everybody to think I was going to Singapore with you. The truth of the matter is, I've got to overtake the *Rusa*."

"Then it's more than speaking her, sir?"

Pickard nodded, and waited a minute before he went on.

"As a matter of fact, I've got to capture her—and take her in tow."

Bogue showed the astonishment proper to the occasion.

"That's a word full of dynamite, sir—capture!"

"I'm well aware of the fact," said Pickard. "You needn't worry on that score. The *Rusa's* loaded with goods stolen from Benjamin Anderson and Company, and the chinks aboard are getting away with it."

"You mean they're pirates?" asked Bogue, avoiding looking at Kenton.

"No better than pirates, but not the kind you're thinking of. Desperate enough, but land thieves, looters of godowns. I'm aboard here to get that property, no matter how long it takes, or what's involved. Mr. Kenton—and Yates—know about it. And they're aboard here to help."

"That's a new string to the fiddle for me," said Bogue. He appeared to be worried.

"But not a hard one for you to play," said Pickard, a bit sharply. "If you'll just get the *Tung-hai* on a course that'll give us a chance to overtake that schooner, we'll get down to the business in hand."

Bogue gravely turned and inspected the chart.

"She'd have a beam wind; maybe she'd quarter it a little, if she wants to make a fast run for Kawal," he declared.

"What time would she be making?"

"Six to eight knots, unless she's a lot faster than I think, and better handled than she will be. Has she got a white sailing master, sir?"

"I can't say, but I'd believe she hasn t. That bunch aboard her wouldn't be playing with white men, unless they intend to cut the white men's throats when they're close to Kawal. I wouldn't put that past 'em. Bad lot, Skipper."

Bogue made a mental calculation, laid his parallel rulers along the chart and figured a minute with a pencil.

"I'll give the mate the new course, sir," he said, and stepped outside to the bridge.

"That's as much as he needs to know," said Pickard in a whisper to Kenton.

"You're quite right, sir," agreed Kenton. "All you want is the result. But I think he'll balk before he's done. The more he thinks it over, the more he'll worry about the business."

"Let him worry," said Pickard. "He'll obey orders. I'm taking the responsibility."

CAPTAIN BOGUE was coming back. He slammed the door behind him and, without a word, returned to the chart. He remained studying it several minutes, while Pickard and Kenton smoked in silence.

Bogue turned to Pickard.

"If she sailed around five o'clock this morning—got out through the channel, and clear, that is—she's got sixteen hours lead on us. It's nine now," he went on, with a glance at the bulkhead clock, "and as we're southing, it's all the same. With a beam wind such as she's had in this stage of the monsoon, I'd give her six knots, good, and that gives her an approximate position of ninety-six miles from the sea buoy."

"What have we logged?" asked Pickard.

"Not above thirty-three knots—miles, that is."

"Then we can't have passed her? She's not in any of the waters we've covered?"

"Not a chance," said Bogue. "She'd have to be lying to, to be in our way at any time since we sailed.

"Then she's sixty-three miles ahead of us, as you figure it, eh, Skipper?"

"Say sixty, and let it go at that, sir."

"Assuming we hold our present speed, when will we be close to her?" asked Pickard.

"Assuming we run up on her in her wake, which isn't likely, with a few more turns on the propeller—let's see—"

He looked aside and ruffled his brows in mental calculation.

"You can make twelve to thirteen knots, can't you?" asked Pickard.

"If we burn the coal, yes, sir. Five hours—she'll have made good another thirty on us by that time—add two hours—that brings it to about four o'clock in the morning, more or less, before we'd be likely to scratch any paint on her. If the weather holds clear, and she steers the courses to be expected, that is. You never can tell what a chink skipper can do with fore and aft rig, and when they're on the run with loot, as you say, they may go wide of the proper course for Kawal, especially if they think they might be chased."

"I don't see why they'd expect to be chased," said Pickard.

"What if you'd sent a torpedo boat after that schooner, sir."

Pickard looked startled at the idea.

"I don't get you," he said.

"If you don't mind my saying so, I think you could've done your job of catching the *Rusa* through government boats. There were a pair of 'em in port."

"You mean you don't like the job; is that it?" Pickard's tone was sharp, but Kenton also saw that he was afraid that Bogue suspected something irregular in using a freight steamer to pursue thieves.

"I can't say that I do, sir. I like to know what job of work I'm on before I leave port. I got in serious trouble once, as you know, by taking my orders after I got to sea."

"Do you ask to be relieved of command? At sea?" demanded Pickard. "If you do, Bogue, I can arrange it." He was frankly out of temper now.

"I didn't say that, sir," replied Bogue. His eyes wavered and met Kenton's. They knew it was likely Pickard had already hinted to Mr. Landon that he might find himself in command of the *Tung-hai* before they were in port again. "But I think I ought to know just what you intend to do. You said you wanted to capture the schooner. I'm entitled to know just what you mean by that, being master—and responsible."

"Perhaps you're right, there. The reason I didn't send any government vessel is that I wanted no information given out. I assure you that I have every right to take that schooner."

"Even if you have to kill some of the crew?" pressed Bogue.

"Captain, break out the machine guns aboard and turn 'em over to Mr. Yates. He's aboard here to use 'em—and I understand he's an expert with 'em. He's aboard here to sweep the *Rusa's* deck clear of any chinks who feel like giving us a fight!" He looked Bogue straight in the eyes.

"What if I lose my master's ticket out of such business?" asked Bogue.

"You won't lose your ticket. There's a chink named Tsang aboard the schooner. I've got to get him, and I'll do the arguing with the authorities when it's all over."

"But if I'm charged with piracy, who'll argue—"

"Benjamin Anderson and Company. The job is legal, and Old Man Anderson'll back me up to the limit. You'll have a job for life, master's ticket or no. Are you ready to carry out my orders, Captain Bogue?"

"Obey orders if you break owners," said Bogue. "You're the owner's representative aboard here. I've Mr. Kenton as a witness, but I'd like to have my orders in writing, sir."

"That's easy enough," said Pickard, rising. "I'll step down to the saloon and write your orders out, and then you'll have proof that I take full responsibility for everything."

HE PULLED the door open and went out on the bridge, rather abruptly, as if glad to get away.

Bogue and Kenton listened to him going down the ladder. And the skipper looked out to make sure that the mate was on the end of the bridge.

"What do you think Landon told him, anyway?" asked Kenton in a whisper.

Bogue filled his pipe thoughtfully for a minute.

"I don't know, but the mate has stirred up Pickard's suspicions, right enough."

"He was hostile when he came in, but he changed his tune, and pretty quickly, too," said Kenton.

"For some reason he held his horses, decided he didn't want to start a row just then. He knew that what I said was intended to check him, and his going below to write out the orders gave him an excuse to wait until he could see me alone. That means he's suspicious of you."

Kenton nodded assent.

"I'd say so, but I've an idea that he's not so certain of where you stand. The mate may have heard a word or two, and would like to put you in wrong with Pickard."

"You bet he would!" said Bogue. "He'd like to see me kicked ashore, and get the *Tung-hai* for himself."

"What if Pickard should pull a gun on you, and give Landon command?" suggested Kenton. "That'd put a spoke in our wheels, Skipper."

"Pickard's in such a frame of mind that I wouldn't put anything past him," said Bogue. "He's keeping himself up on sheer nerve, and if Landon shakes that nerve, the boss may blow up—and we'll have fireworks."

"We'd better not leave him by himself too long," said Kenton.

The skipper reached up and turned off the lights.

"Come along with me. And don't be surprised if I find some pretext to get under his skin a little. He always blurts things out when he's mad enough."

"But perhaps he'd go farther if you went down alone."

"At present, we want to be casual. I'll tip you to slip away if I see he wants a private talk. But you be careful."

"I'll watch him," agreed Kenton. "But just remember, we can't let him gum things up at this stage of the game."

"He can't hurt anybody with that gun he's got," said Bogue. "Let's go."

CHAPTER XII

A DANGEROUS SITUATION

BOGUE led the way aft to the social hall. The lights were off as the two men entered, and Kenton stood for a minute in the doorway. There was an upglare of illumination from the saloon below. At the far end, forward, visible down the stairway, they could see Pickard bent over the table, writing rapidly with a fountain pen on paper spread out before him on the red cloth. Ho Seng, the steward, stood nearby, wiping a glass. He had just opened a jar of stone ginger, which stood at Pickard's elbow.

Captain Bogue moved to the head of the stairway, and Kenton peered over his shoulder. They paused for a minute, watching, not wishing to intrude until Pickard had finished.

Presently the man at the table lifted his head and looked up the stairway. He waved a welcoming hand.

"Come have a drink of stone ginger, gentlemen!" he called, and went on with his writing.

"See that bill of fare beside him?" asked Kenton in a whisper. "If you can find some way to have the steward lift it, I'll explain later, but get that card."

Bogue nodded and started down the stairs.

"Thought you might want to be alone, sir," he replied.

Pickard threw down his pen and leaned back in the swivel chair.

"No, it's all right. Come along. I've finished your orders." He spoke to Ho Seng, who disappeared in the pantry through the swinging door.

Bogue passed Pickard's chair and went to the pantry, saying he wanted to have a look round. Kenton, at a gesture from Pickard, sat down in the nearest chair beside his new employer. The skipper was back at once, and went round the end of the table to a chair opposite Pickard.

Ho Seng came back with two tumblers and began serving the stone ginger.

Bogue was reading the orders which Pickard had written.

Kenton glanced at the printed bill of fare between him and Pickard. It was rather a large card, with three columns of type, showing a wide variety of food aboard the *Tung-hai*, until it was explained that only those items of food underlined with a pencil were ready to be served. A dozen kinds of soup were printed, yet only one was underlined for dinner that night. The system made it possible for the Chinese cook to provide a list of what he had on any voyage without attempting to write English. Pickard had taken that card away from the dinner table with him, and Kenton knew it was the card which had been beside Yates's place.

"I'm satisfied with these orders," said Bogue, as he folded the sheet of paper, and put it in an inner pocket.

"Just a matter of form—and protection for you," said Pickard. "I don't want you to be dragged into any piracy, you know." He laughed lightly, and picked up his glass of stone ginger.

Kenton's hand moved toward the card. But without looking, and as if he had not noted the movement, Pickard drew the card away, lifted the edge of the table cloth, and slipped the card under it on his left side.

Ho Seng, who was sleepy eyed, stopped behind Pickard's chair and glanced at the skipper. The steward's lean and yellow face was immobile, but he seemed to be taken aback by Pickard's action.

"All right, Ho Seng, you can go," said Bogue.

Ho Seng simply lifted his shoulders in a gesture of helplessness, and with a glance at the spot where the card had disappeared from view, moved his white clad legs toward the pantry. His heelless slippers shuffled over the strip of carpet with a peculiar suggestion of insolence which Kenton understood. He had been ordered to pick up the card by the skipper, now the master had changed his mind when the card was put out of reach.

"I'm not much afraid of piracy," said Bogue. "But if you want to take me off the course which the clearance calls for, I want to log the orders. Underwriters dealing with the owner and underwriters getting a grudge on a skipper, are two different things."

"All right, your skirts are clear, Skipper," said Pickard.

He turned his head. The steward was back by his side, bringing napkins. He had lifted the edge of the cloth and was about to pick up the card.

"Now, you leave that here, Ho Seng!" said Pickard, as he thrust the steward's hand aside. And Ho Seng hurried away, with a puzzled glance at Bogue.

"What's he trying to do, anyway?" asked Bogue.

"He's got an awful yen for taking this dinner bill away from me," said Pickard with a grin. "I want to keep it in my cabin, so I can look it over, and order anything that hits my fancy."

Bogue appeared amused.

"He's afraid that you'll order something special cooked, and he wants to get his shut-eye, that's all."

"He's not going to get that card," said Pickard. He drank off his glass of stone ginger, and shifted the track of the conversation. "How do you find Mr. Landon—as a chief officer?"

BOGUE'S face grew serious.

"I don't quite understand, sir," he said.

The question puzzled him, and his mind leaped back to the fact that Pickard had talked for some time with the mate on the bridge before entering the chartroom.

"Do you find him a reliable officer? And does he seem satisfied with his berth?"

Bogue made a face, showing that an unpleasant subject had come up.

"He's reliable enough, but I can't say Mr. Landon is satisfied. He's about fifteen years older than I am, you know, and he was chief officer here when you gave me command. He expected to get the ship himself. Naturally, he nurses a

grudge, because I've been master some two years, and he's still mate."

"I'm not surprised that he has a grudge," said Pickard thoughtfully, as he turned his glass round and round on the table with idling fingers, and keeping his eyes upon it as if trying to solve an intricate puzzle. "Most juniors want to get on faster than is possible. But I've always regarded Landon as a good man, and he has a master's ticket."

Captain Bogue leaned forward on his elbows. One eye was partly shut. The other bored into Pickard's face with an angry gleam.

"Are you bringing up the matter of Landon's ticket in connection with what you said about relieving me of command, in the chartroom?"

Pickard lifted his eyes and met Bogue's angry glare. But the older man smiled in a vague sort of way. He seemed to enjoy giving the captain grounds for worrying.

"Not wholly," he replied softly. "Landon was quite plain with me on the bridge tonight. He doesn't like his present berth." Pickard's attitude now was that he had not come to the main point of his oral maneuvering.

"I presume he said something against me. I'm not surprised if he did, but considering the fact that you jumped me over him in promotion, his dislike for me should not be held against me. I've always been considerate of Mr. Landon, and—"

"He said nothing against you, Skipper," broke in Pickard. Now his eyes had an amused twinkle. "He said it was time that he had a command with the company, or he intended to look elsewhere. I can't say I blame him for feeling that way."

Kenton rose.

"If you'll excuse me, gentlemen, I'll look up Yates and have a game of cards."

Pickard turned to him and said affably.

"I'm sorry, there's nothing private about our talk, so far as I'm concerned. Mr. Kenton, But I don't want to make you uncomfortable with—"

"I'd like to have a few words in private with Mr. Pickard, if you don't mind," said Bogue to Kenton.

The young man nodded and moved up the stairway through the social hall, He closed the starboard door as he passed out on deck.

"NOW, look here, Mr. Pickard," Bogue began when Kenton was out of earshot. "I don't like to be cat and moused! You sound as if you intended to relieve me of command of the *Tung-hai*."

"That's exactly what I intend to do, Captain Bogue."

Pickard grinned as he uttered the words. There seemed to be no ill feeling about the matter, but it was plain that he had made his decision and was going to go through with it.

"All right, sir!" snapped Bogue. "When does Landon take over?"

"At the end of this voyage."

Bogue showed his relief. The anger in his eyes waned, and he settled back in his chair.

"Very good, sir. I know now where I am, and that's what I asked for. Landon will make a good master."

"Yes, I think he will. He knows the *Tung-hai*, or ought to. He's not a man of any great education, but he's had a long service with the company, and I think he'll give satisfaction as master. I'm sorry he's been held back so long."

"You've told him he was to have her?" asked Bogue. He revealed no anger, nor chagrin, but was coldly polite.

"No, I didn't, but I promised I'd give him a ship. And there's only one detail I've neglected to mention. Old Foster's going on his pension, and I'm going to give you command of the *Sung-kiang*."

Captain Bogue stood upright, gasping with surprise. Then he sat down and gazed at Pickard, astounded.

"Why—I thought—you were going to beach me! And you say—I'm to be promoted—to the ranking vessel of the company! Are you joking?"

"No, I'm not, Bogue." He was sud-

denly serious, and with a look toward the head of the social hall stairs, he went on in a lowered voice. "I brought this matter up so Kenton would get out. I wanted a talk with you alone. I've always trusted you, Bogue, and I trust you now. You'll be promoted, but there's something of vital importance I want to take up with you. And I'll need you to stand behind me."

"Why, what are you driving at?" demanded Bogue.

"Bogue, I'm in a dangerous situation. So's the ship, and everybody aboard her." Pickard's face revealed the fact that he was sincerely alarmed; he glanced up to the social hall once more.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CAPITAL A'S

THERE was no necessity for Captain Bogue to feign astonishment over Pickard's strange revelation. The captain knew that his superior referred to Kenton. Pickard had blundered upon something which might block Kenton's plans.

"Danger!" whispered Bogue. "I don't get you, sir. Of course, the business with this schooner ahead, that's likely to be dangerous, but—"

"I haven't told you all there is to that," put in Pickard hastily. He leaned forward over the table and spoke in barely audible tones. "I've kept the bulk of the thing secret from you, but the truth is, the cargo in the *Rusa* is gold coin—probably a quarter of a million dollars."

Bogue's jaw dropped. Now he was pretending astonishment. It was necessary that he take Pickard's story with every show of never having had any inkling of the truth.

"What the devil are we up against, sir?"

"That's something I'll take up with you later," said Pickard. "It's not the schooner that worries me now. The danger I mentioned is all about us, and we're likely to be into it any minute. I want you to know just what's at stake, and then I expect you to back me up—to the limit."

"You can rely on me, Mr. Pickard," said Bogue.

"I want more than mere reliance such as might be expected in any ordinary sea danger," said Pickard. "You've got to back me with bullets if necessary, and without question. Never mind the legal aspects. We've passed out of the legal side, understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Bogue. "I won't forget what you've done for me and I'll work for your best interests." He held out a hand across the table to Pickard. "Tell me everything, and I'll see that you come out right, sir."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Skipper," said Pickard, as he shook the captain's hand. "You'll have to do some surprising things, most likely. It's a surprising mess, as you'll find. When I said we were in a dangerous fix, I meant it. And as for Mr. Landon, I want you to tell him that I've given you the *Sung-kiang*, and that when I asked your opinion about giving him this steamer, that you stood for him, and that he'll get it. So Landon'll be behind you, no fear there. He'll obey your orders, even if he has to kill a man or two. I can't explain at the moment. Kenton may be back any minute."

"Then you suspect Kenton of something that'll mean trouble for us?" asked Bogue.

"I do, indeed. There's something wrong aboard here, and it's mostly my own fault. As a matter of fact, Kenton has sewn me up in as slick a game as I've ever seen."

"And I'd say that he's not alone in the business," said Bogue. "I've not been any too sure about that chap Yates. Friend of Kenton's, I'd say."

"Yes, of course. I brought Yates aboard at Kenton's say so. I was thoroughly swindled, I know now."

"In what way, sir?"

"I'm convinced that both Kenton and Yates are criminals, and the most dan-

gerous and ruthless type of criminals, too."

Captain Bogue screwed his face up into a painful grimace.

"If you're right, what's the game, anyhow? But I supposed that you knew Yates well enough to hire him, that you had references and all that. You must've given Kenton a good job, to have him along with you in the first place. I thought all the time that old Anderson had sent him down to you, or something like that."

"No. He said he had references, but I never asked for 'em. I've only known him a couple of days. And it was on account of something he did for me, that I took him on. The result is that I'm in one hell of a jam!"

"But even if they're criminals, I can't understand what you're afraid of," said Bogue. "We ought to be able to handle a couple of men aboard here, if they pull anything."

"Perhaps we can. That's why I want you to know what to expect. And Kenton knows what's aboard that schooner. He's here for no other reason, and you can take it for granted that he's prepared for trouble."

"You don't mean to say that two men came aboard this steamer with the idea that they could get the schooner!"

"I mean exactly that, Skipper. I don't see now just how, of course, but as I look back over certain events, I've every reason to believe that these two men have laid careful plans."

"Oh, hell! Pardon me—but you're on edge, Mr. Pickard. I've noticed it all day, from the time I was in your office. You don't seem to have your old grip on yourself at all. Now just put one thing out of your mind, and sleep easy. These two men are not going to take charge of my decks. Forget it!"

Pickard shook his head doubtfully.

"Easy said, but maybe not easy done. Don't be too cocksure, Bogue. It's all a bigger game than you realize, and I've just begun to suspect it myself. A couple of hours ago I wouldn't've believed it possible, any more than you do now. But the wheels have been turning for days—maybe weeks. Now, look here! I want you to see the first little kink in the chain of events." He drew the printed bill of fare from under the tablecloth. "It was the beginning of my suspicions."

HE PUSHED the card toward Bogue, turning it over to reveal penciled words on the margin, and several apparently meaningless drawings. That side of the card had not been visible to either Ho Seng or Kenton.

Bogue took the card and studied it with interest, turning it about in an effort to get sense out of scrawled designs never intended to have sense. They were simply the idle scratching of a man who had a pencil and time on his hands.

"I can't make head nor tail of this," said the captain presently. "Don't know what it's all about. Does it mean anything to you, sir?" He laid the card down.

"Yes, it means a lot. You will notice that the word August is written several times. In themselves, the words mean nothing, perhaps. The drawings I don't care about. But will you examine carefully the form of the capital A's in the word August?"

Bogue picked up the card again. After a minute's scrutiny, holding it to get the full effect of the light from the bulb overhead, he put it down again.

"This is the middle of July. A man might scrawl August several times, without having any special idea in mind."

"Yes, we all do that kind of scribbling," said Pickard, as he reached into a pocket and brought out a folded slip of paper. "Yates did that while we were finishing dinner. He smoked and finished his coffee. He got a pencil out when we first sat down, because he expected he'd have to write out his orders, or check 'em off on the card."

"I thought perhaps you might have fingerprints on that card," said Bogue, "but before they could mean anything,

you'd have to find that Yates had finger-prints with the police, and you didn't know that when we sailed, eh?"

"Nothing of that sort," said Pickard. "But as Yates scribbled, my eye caught something that made me pick up this card when I left the table. And perhaps you noticed that the steward tried to get it away from me, here, after you and Kenton came."

"Yes, I couldn't avoid seeing that something was queer about that," admitted Bogue. "Not that I gave it much thought. But Ho Seng wanted that card, and he wanted it badly."

"I believe he got a signal from Kenton to make away with the bill of fare. But I blocked that game."

"Why, in that case, Kenton and the steward would have to be in cahoots—and for some time," said the skipper. "You think that?"

"I don't know what to think. I'll see about that point later. For now, I want you to have a look at this document." He unfolded the slip of paper he had taken from his pocket, the cable blank with the lettered message which had warned Pickard that Tsang was sailing for Kawal in the *Rusa*. "I count eighteen capital A's in this message, and all of them, in some degree, have the same type of A that's in the Augusts that're carefully written on the bill of fare. See here! A little hook upward from the second leg of the A." He handed Bogue the cable blank.

The captain made a careful examination of both card and message.

"Why, yes! What the devil does it all mean?"

"Nothing much, except that the same man wrote the message—and did the scribbling on the bill of fare card."

Captain Bogue gazed with puckered brows at Pickard.

"How's that? I don't quite grasp—"

"Read that message. You'll see that it's full of information. It was sent to me as a warning, a tip-off that Tsang had sailed in his schooner with some gold. And that message is the reason why I sailed with you this afternoon and brought Kenton and Yates along."

"Then they knew about this gold, before you told 'em." He seemed to be just beginning to get the drift of what Pickard was driving at.

"I told Yates nothing, Skipper. And I told Kenton nothing until I got the message. The gist of the matter is that they both knew, and before I did, that Tsang had skipped with company gold and where he was going. And Kenton was in my office when that note arrived. I didn't know who sent it, of course, and he pretended not to know. But he managed things so cleverly that he got me to sail with you after the schooner."

"That's as funny as a monkey with a razor," said Bogue. "Yet the whole thing seems to be all right. If this money was stolen from the company, the most logical thing for you to do was to get after it. I don't see anything criminal so far."

"Not on the face of it, no," agreed Pickard, "but that note was a plant on me. The whole thing was rigged up, and only after dinner did I catch on. It was the fact that Yates had the same kind of a pencil that wrote the message which first caught my attention. See! An office copying pencil, with a purple color—the same pencil, the same man, the same kind of capital A. And both Kenton and Yates knew more than I did about where the stolen company funds were gone. And Yates an expert with machine guns! I tell you, Skipper, I've been bilked in the whole business."

"There's no doubt on that score, sir," agreed Bogue, "but how can two men do anything with that schooner when we've caught it? There must be more to the plot."

"There is more. These two men don't expect to take the schooner away from us. When I suggested to Kenton that I might bring along some men who'd be handy in a fight, he said that with Yates we could handle the whole thing. They know they're going to have help. Either Kenton has got some chinks in the crew who'll mutiny for him when he's ready to

take the ship and schooner away from us, or he's got a vessel with armed men who'll meet us after we've got the schooner in tow. Then, with Yates handling machine guns aboard here, we'd find ourselves in a bad mess."

"I think you're worrying about something that ain't likely," said Bogue. "These two men seem all right to me, Mr. Pickard."

"They've fooled you, Bogue! It's a big game they're in, a quarter of a million dollars or more. Kenton hinted as much in my office, that Tsang's got more than company money. As a matter of fact, I've got clear proof that these two know more than I do and have all along."

CAPTAIN BOGUE considered the matter in silence, watching the smoke from his pipe rise to the wisps of wind coming through a partly opened side port.

"Just the same, sir, I think you jumped to conclusions in that little business with Ho Seng. I don't think Kenton has had anything to do with the steward."

"That's not an important point in my chain of evidence," said Pickard. "I don't bank on it. But how long has that steward been with you?"

"For several years. Came as a young lad. I doubt if Kenton had a word with him. But I'll take the matter up now, if—"

Pickard held up a restraining hand.

"Say nothing now."

"All right, sir."

"Any new seamen, or black gang, shipped while in port?"

"Not a new man aboard. I've got a regular crew."

"That's good. But I've been thinking over the delay you had in loading. Did there seem to be any particular trouble with the Chinese stevedores, or any special delay in delivery by the Chinese shippers?"

"Come to think of it, the lorchas of Chinese were late in getting alongside. But what's suspicious about that?"

"Perhaps Tsang had a hand in trying to delay your sailing so he could be sure of getting away without being chased. The *Tung-hai* was the only company vessel in port."

"I should think he'd want me to sail ahead of his jump with his schooner, and he must've known when he was going to slip from port. If your evidence against Kenton and Yates is as thin as this matter of my delays in loading—"

"I'm not alone in my suspicions of Kenton. I find that Mr. Landon has his own ideas along that line."

"Mr. Landon! Why, what can he know—or suspect?" asked Bogue, suddenly leaning forward over the table. "Have you said—"

"No. I said nothing to Landon. He brought the subject up himself. Which leads me to believe that my own suspicions are right."

"That's a horse of another color! What did Landon say?"

"Only that he's sure he's seen Kenton somewhere before. And Kenton has made it a rule to keep out of his sight since coming aboard—avoids him, that is, when he can."

"Oh, fiddler's gin! That means nothing at all," said Bogue.

"It means a lot, to me. Landon says Kenton's not the man's name; he says he remembered the name Kenton, because his own sister's married to a man named Kenton."

Bogue turned grave at once.

"If Landon's as sure of the fact that Kenton had another name, that's mighty important, but it's up to him to use his memory, instead of vague ideas on—"

"He's seen Kenton in some ship, a passenger, maybe. And he's said something to the second mate, too, Mr. Ling."

"I'm sorry he shot his face off to Ling," said Bogue. "Not that Ling isn't all right, but he's half Chinese, you know. And I don't like such gabbling aboard among the officers. It may get into the crew. I'll have to talk to Mr. Landon on—"

"Don't say a word now. Landon's trying to go back through his memory.

I've already told him to keep quiet. He says he's puzzled, is sure he remembers the face, but can't hook the name. Says there's something about it all that he ought to remember, that Kenton was arrested, or something of that sort, which ought to bring back the name."

"OH, LANDON'S probably got things twisted. Kenton may look like somebody that was arrested. Mr. Landon was second mate in the *Sung-kiang* for years, and he met thousands of passengers. He'd most likely get several people confused in his recollections."

"He swears he knows the name doesn't fit."

"We can't put too much store in that angle of the thing," said Bogue. "But when he's slept on the matter, it may clear up."

"But it may be too late then. We're going to be close up to that schooner before long."

"We can't expect much trouble until we've caught the schooner."

"No. But when we've got her, we've got to see that Yates has the machine guns taken away from him, or—" He broke off his sentence, for he had caught out of the corner of his eye a sound from the social hall above.

Then a draft of air downward told that a door to the deck had been opened. Next, a Chinese seaman appeared at the head of the stairway. Bogue and Pickard could see him peering down into the saloon, hesitant, and apparently afraid to come further.

Bogue got to his feet.

"Get out of here!" he cried.

The Chinese held up his hands.

"Tan Yu want make talk, sar!" He made a beckoning gesture, and looked over his shoulder. "Come! Come!"

His bare legs were shining in the light that lifted upward from the saloon. He was wearing only a loincloth. They could see his teeth shining in the vague illumination about his head. Drops of water sparkled on his bare shoulders. Then he came down two steps in a faltering way, and paused with one foot lifted as if ready for flight upward again. He stabbed forward into the air in the direction of the pantry door with one hand, and whispered something hoarsely which neither Bogue nor Pickard could understand.

The captain moved forward toward the stairway in three swift steps.

Pickard pulled out his revolver and leaped to his feet.

"Look out, Skipper!" he warned. "There's something behind all this! Don't walk into a trap!"

Bogue halted.

"What you doing in here, Tan Yu? What you want? Sing out, sharp-like, and—"

Before Bogue could finish, the swinging door of the pantry burst outward with violence. A white clad figure rushed into the saloon, sped past Pickard and Bogue, and, bent forward like a man in a race, bounded up the stairway. It was the steward.

Tan Yu gave a cry of terror, then fled up the stairway in one leap, and disappeared on deck.

"Was that Ho Seng?" gasped Pickard.

"It was, and he had a knife!" replied Bogue.

They heard bare feet running on deck. The steward had lost his heelless slippers on the stairs.

"Come on!" cried Bogue, as he drew a revolver. He ran up to the social hall, followed by Pickard.

CHAPTER XIV

THE QUICK HAND

KENTON and Yates were standing against the rail at the forward end of the saloon deck, when they heard a clamor of voices from the forecastle. A door burst open and pale light spilled out on the deck plates where the bulkhead made a shadow in the moonlight.

A throng of half naked Chinese came

tumbling on deck. From them a figure came in a swift run, heading for the starboard ladder near where Kenton and Yates stood.

The seaman, almost naked, scrambled up the ladder, panting. He darted aft. Then Mr. Landon bawled from the bridge, in sharp questioning. Somebody below answered in shrill pidgin words. It seemed to Kenton that the mate was demanding of the boatswain what was happening.

The clamor below continued, then died out, and some of the men went back to the forecastle. Standing in the shadow of the bridge, Kenton and Yates listened.

"Where did that bird go?" asked Kenton in a whisper.

"Looked to me as if he slipped into the door of the social hall," said Yates. "Somethin's up, but we better wait and lay low."

Presently their attention was drawn aft again. The seaman leaped into view through the door of the social hall. He was still in mad flight, but coming back forward. As they looked, a white figure spurted through the same door, in swift pursuit of the fleeing seaman, who was now yelling. Both men were plainly visible in the moonlight. Kenton saw what he took to be a knife in the swaying hand of the figure in white.

"That's the steward!" said Kenton. "Keep clear!" He drew Yates aside, to make a fairway for the running men toward the ladder to the foredeck.

But the seaman did not go down the ladder. Instead, he made a sharp turn round the forward corner of the superstructure and disappeared aft again, along the port saloon deck. The steward, close upon the seaman's heels, kept after him.

Kenton and Yates ran after them. Now they saw the two receding figures against the background of the moonlit sea as they raced aft, clearly silhouetted, like dancing figures. The seaman darted from side to side, between rail and bulkhead, trying to throw off his pursuer.

They had almost gained the after end of the saloon deck when the seaman gave a terrified scream. The steward had struck at him. Then Ho Seng leaped upon the shoulders of the man, and brought him to the deck. They fell close to the athwartship rail which was over the well deck.

As the pair struggled, the seaman screaming, both white men ran for them. Black shadows spurted up through the hatchway to the engine room and crowded in the fiddley grating, peering out and calling questions. Doors slammed, and voices demanded what was wrong. And above all the clamor, came the bawling voice of Mr. Landon from the bridge.

Before he reached the struggling pair, Kenton saw the upraised hand of the steward give off a silver flash. He knew it for a naked blade catching the moonlight. The hand fell. There was an agonized cry in a minor key from the seaman. Once more the blade came up. Now there was no flash of light from the steel. Again Ho Seng struck, with a grunting fury. Then he reared upward from his victim, fought himself free from a yellow hand which clung to him, and looked about. Seeing Kenton and Yates close upon him, he bolted for the nearby ladder which led down to the well deck.

Out of the gathering groups behind Kenton, Captain Bogue appeared on the run. His revolver glinted. He was breathless, and behind him came Pickard, thrusting firemen aside in his efforts to keep close to the skipper.

"Stop that steward!" cried Bogue. "Get him!"

Ho Seng had paused for an instant at the head of the ladder, to get his bearings and avoid falling down with the roll of the steamer if he missed the hand irons.

"He stabbed this man!" cried Yates. "Look out! He's got a knife, Cap'n!"

Hearing the captain's voice, Ho Seng turned and looked over his shoulder. He left the head of the ladder and darted around the after side of the superstructure. He swung up on the rail, to hang over and drop to the well deck.

Captain Bogue thrust his revolver

forward and fired, almost under Kenton's chin.

Ho Seng was not over the rail when the bullet hit him, but partly across it, and with one leg hanging down. He lost his hold on the piping which held the stanchions together, grabbed madly into the air, and with the next roll of the steamer, toppled over, on the outside. They heard him hit the iron deck plates below, and the tinkling music of his knife as it went skittering over iron in the well deck.

THERE was a babble of questionings from all directions. A man in pajamas, known to Kenton as the chief engineer, pushed forward to the rail with Captain Bogue and looked down. Men appeared in the well deck, including the saloon cook, who fluttered about in a nightshirt and talked Chinese to nobody in particular. Bogue checked the noise below with a few sharp words and then ordered that the body of the steward be brought up.

Pickard was bending over Tan Yu, who was twisting himself about and clawing at the planking. He was trying to say something. But his words were only incoherent gurglings in Chinese.

"Mr. Ling, see if you can find out what he's saying," said Bogue to the nearby group.

A tall slender man, in a shirt which flapped in the wind, stepped over beside Pickard and tried to listen. But he could not get the meaning of the words bubbling from Tan Yu's lips. In a minute the seaman had stretched himself in a convulsive movement of the body, his heels beat upon the deck in a rapid tattoo, and he suddenly lay still and silent.

"He's dead, sir," reported Mr. Ling. "I could not tell what he said."

Pickard and the second mate drew a little away from the seaman. The blood and perspiration on his skin gave off a queer gleam in the moonlight. His queue matted head rolled from side to side with the heave of the vessel. A great black stain began to spread over the white planks, tiny rivulets reaching out and changing their courses abruptly as the steamer rose and fell and rolled. Kenton, as he watched, could think of the stain only as the shadow of a devil fish thrusting about with his tentacles in search of an elusive prey.

Mr. Landon came aft, blustering about with an electric flashlight, squirting needless luminosity through the moonlight. The wavering beams from the hand light, turning to jumping ovals as they rolled over deck and bulkhead, seemed to cut men in two as they crossed the shadows on the deck.

"Who is it?" demanded the mate excitedly. "And what's been done here? Stabbin', hey? This is a hell of a note! What're they loose for, anyhow, on all this knifin' business, and all?"

"Now just get everybody away from here, Mister!" said Bogue crossly. "All hands! Clear out!" He waved his arms.

"That's Tan Yu!" said Landon, as he swung his light down on the face of the dead man. "He's been sick and seein' ghosts till he had half the crew nuts. But that don't give 'em no call to let a knife in him. And who was it that shot off a gun?"

"I did the shooting," said Bogue. "Never mind now, Mister."

"You'll have to go away," said Landon, approaching Kenton. "It's orders, sir, and—"

"Mr. Kenton and Mr. Yates are to stay here with us," broke in Pickard.

Landon turned to the others—firemen, and all the others who had come from the foredeck, including some seamen and the boatswain. The chief engineer took a hand and herded his men forward and down the gratings.

"How'd Tan Yu come to get up on the saloon deck, Mr. Landon?" asked Bogue, when the mate came back.

"There was trouble forward among the men, sir, and they broke out of the focsle, and Tan Yu, he give a beller and the next I knew he was up the ladder. You know, last week, he stole my shirt, and I gives him hell. I dunno what the trouble was, but—"

"Never mind, then. Break out some matting from the locker in the social hall, under the transoms."

IN THE meantime, men from the well deck had brought the body of Ho Seng up the latter and laid him beside his victim.

"I was goin' on to say, sir," continued the mate, "that I tried to find out what it was, and—"

"We can find out later. Quiet the crew for'ard, and see that Mr. Ling looks into the business."

"Yes, sir." Mr. Landon waved his electric flashlight about, and turned in his tracks several times, apparently a trifle confused. "I pumped the bosun as much as I could, sir, but he's kind of gone out of his head, as the sayin' is. Just jabbered and jabbered, like the devil had his hind foot down his throat."

He slouched to the social hall door, entered and turned on the lights, swinging his flash about and muttering to himself something about a "crazy house adrift and all hands as looney as a lot of Finns at a picnic".

"It's too bad you had to kill that steward, Bogue," began Pickard. "We should've questioned him on why he went after the seaman. Now we're all boggled up on the business."

"Yes, it is too bad," said Bogue, "but I couldn't tell how many more he'd kill. When they go off their heads, there's no stopping 'em, except to bore 'em with a bullet."

"It looks as if he'd come all the way aft to tell you something," went on Pickard.

"He's been sick, and not right mentally. And he might've had a grudge of some kind against Ho Seng. He didn't know what to do when he found us in the saloon, and Ho Seng, afraid of him, just naturally went amuck—but as to that, we never know what chinks are up to."

"I think you know what I mean," said Pickard.

"Yes, I've an idea what you're driving at," said the captain, "but let's see what we can do. Mr. Landon, have a couple of men up here, and bring the bodies into the social hall, if you've got the matting spread."

PICKARD followed Bogue into the social hall and invited Kenton and Yates to follow.

"You'd both better be here," he suggested. "I don't know exactly what the skipper intends to do."

"We'd better search 'em both," said Bogue. "Not that I expect it'll amount to anything, but we've got to find out what we can."

When the two dead men had been laid on the matting, side by side, Mr. Landon and the seamen were dismissed.

"Shut the doors, Mr. Kenton," said Bogue. "And you might turn the keys in the locks." Bogue shut the open ports.

"Now then, who's to do this job of searching?" asked Pickard.

"I don't mind helping out," said Kenton.

"All right. Sit down, gentlemen," said the captain, as he pointed to a transom seat covered with cushions. The social hall was a relic of the days when the *Tung-hai* carried passengers, and the old faded green cushions remained. Staterooms were aft, and ran to the after end of the superstructure.

Yates, his sunburned face looking worried, sat down away from Bogue and Pickard, on the other side, and lighted a cigaret. He did not appear to be concerned about the dead men; he apparently had seen many dead bodies covered with blood. But he kept glancing from Pickard to Kenton in a curious way.

Kenton bent and went through the scanty clothing of Tan Yu with deft fingers. The seaman wore little except the loincloth, and a fabric belt that was as wide as a hand, buckled at the side. From the front there was sewn to the belt a rather large and triangular purse made of a soft reddish colored leather, such as is common to certain types of Chinese coolies.

The purse held little. Kenton brought to light a few silver and copper coins,

some brass cash tied with a string that was run through the holes in the coins, a pair of small dice with blue spots, a few slips of red paper that appeared to be Chinese lottery tickets, a small packet of cigarets with a bamboo holder burned black at the end. A small packet made from a piece of old newspaper proved to have nothing in it but dried herbs.

"There's nothing about that junk that throws any light on what we're after," said Pickard, as he leaned forward and examined the things Kenton laid out in a row on the matting.

"Have a try with the steward," said Bogue.

Kenton got up and went to the far side of Ho Seng's body. There was only a wire bottle opener in the pockets of the white jacket. The belt purse was under the upper hem of the white trousers. Kenton unfastened it and drew it off.

One by one the objects came out of the purse, which was divided into compartments. There was the key to a camphorwood chest, a primitive implement made of a tinlike metal; some carved bone about the size of a finger, which might be a good luck charm or a pass to some secret society; a small ivory handled knife with double handles which closed upon the blade; lottery tickets with holes punched through some of the Chinese ideograms; small pink banknotes of a Chinese bank, folded twice. As Kenton took the last item in the purse, he pinched the edges of the folded banknotes so as to open it at the ends.

A gold piece fell upon the matting beside the dead man.

"Hello!" cried Pickard. "What's that?" He bent far down, his eyes fastened upon the glinting yellow metal.

Kenton kept his eyes on the coin.

"It's a twenty dollar piece," he said. He reached for it and held it up nearer the light overhead. "It looks old and worn, Mr. Pickard."

Pickard's hand shot downward and he plucked the coin from Kenton's hand. Then he gave a smothered gasp, and held the coin closer to his eyes, seeking the date.

"What's the matter?" asked Bogue, rising and bending down.

Yates got to his feet and drew near Kenton, who got up from his knees. The three men stared at the gold piece which Pickard held in his open palm. His mouth was open, and his eyes blinking.

"That's sweated!" exclaimed Pickard. "It's some—of Tsang's money!"

CHAPTER XV

CAPTAIN BOGUE DISOBEYS

"TSANG'S money?" exclaimed Captain Bogue. "What's the man talking about, anyhow? What's wrong with it, sir?"

Pickard slumped back on the cushions of the transom seat, but still he held the gold piece in his open palm, looking down upon it.

"There's nothing wrong at all," he said calmly. "Except that that money shouldn't be aboard here, and in that man's clothes."

"How the devil would Ho Seng have Tsang's money?" demanded Bogue.

Pickard shook his head.

"I don't know how to account for it. That coin could not be in circulation, Skipper, and Mr. Kenton knows what I mean, in any other way than to have Tsang put it out. I know it by the date. You understand now what I'm driving at?"

"No, I don't," said Bogue, "unless you mean that Tsang bribed Ho Seng to do something for him aboard here."

Pickard looked at the skipper.

"That's exactly what I mean. There's something going on in the crew that we don't know about. And it's tied up with this stabbing."

"Tsang must've given the steward that money," agreed Kenton.

"I don't see how you're so sure," objected Bogue. "I may be thick, but—"

"This money belonged to the company, and nobody but Tsang had any with such a date. Besides, it's been sweated, which is another thing which makes it

sure it came from Tsang." Pickard was remarkably cool over his amazing discovery, except that his face showed a sickly pallor. He looked at Kenton thoughtfully for a minute. "How do you feel about it?" he asked. "Ain't I right?"

"I don't see how you could be wrong," sir," said Kenton. "You know this gold better than we do, and I don't wonder that it surprises you."

"I'm pretty well shaken up about it," said Pickard. "If one man in this ship has Tsang's money on him, it's likely enough that others have, too."

"That's so, too," said Bogue. "I hadn't thought of it, sir. And if money has been passed to the crew, we'll have trouble."

Pickard held his hand out now, the yellow disk still in his open palm.

"There's the evidence, and the steward stabbed this sailor. What for? What did the sailor want to tell?"

"I'll tell you what I'd better do," said Bogue. "We'll have every man in the crew up here, one at a time, and have him searched. And I'll have Mr. Ling here to question 'em. He can talk Chinese like a dictionary."

Pickard shook his head in a decided negative.

"No, sir. It's too late to bother with anything like that. Searching and questioning will do no good. If we're likely to have trouble with 'em, we'll get it the minute we begin any such examination. They'll know the fat's in the fire then. Besides, they'd hide their gold money, and they'd say nothing, and where'd we be at then?"

"We wouldn't let the first of 'em go back below until all had been searched," said Bogue. "How could they find out what was going on?" Bogue's voice and manner was insistent, not merely suggestive. He gave Kenton a glance which Pickard did not see.

"There's something going on below already," said Pickard, "and with this stabbing, they know the plot's going wrong. It may be that Tan Yu wanted to tip you off. We should've let him down into the saloon and listened to him."

"Then if you don't want to search the crew, what do you want me to do, sir?" Bogue seemed to be out of patience.

"The only sensible thing to do, under the circumstances, is to turn this steamer back for port," said Pickard.

Captain Bogue, startled, looked at Kenton, but the latter did not show the slightest interest in what Pickard had said. Yates took out a cigaret and, tapping the end against his metal case, quietly lighted it.

"YOU'RE the doctor, sir," said Bogue to Pickard, "but it sounds unreasonable to turn back simply because Ho Seng has this gold piece in his clothes."

"It's reason enough for me," said Pickard sharply.

"Are we likely to have a mutiny on our hands in case we head for port?" asked Kenton. "If Tsang has bribed 'em to make trouble for—"

"The only thing Tsang would bribe the crew to do is stop us from catching his schooner. So why should they make trouble because we abandon the chase of the *Rusa*? The men at the wheel have steered the course for Singapore long enough on other passages to know we're not heading for that port. They must know, if they know anything from Tsang, that we're after him."

"Frankly, sir, I think it's all nonsense," said Bogue.

"I don't care what you think!" declared Pickard angrily. "You go about for port—and see to it at once, Captain."

Bogue shrugged his shoulders and gave up the argument. He turned for the locked social hall door on the starboard side, and put his hand on the knob.

"If you'll permit me to say a word, Mr. Pickard," began Kenton, "I'd like to suggest that—"

Pickard sprang to his feet, an angry scowl on his face, his lips trembling, and his face suddenly suffused with a high color.

"I've had all the suggestions from you

that I want, Mr. Kenton!" His lower jaw shook as his rage increased.

"I'm sorry," said Kenton quietly, "but I intend to put in my oar, whether you want it or not. Your nerves are unstrung with—"

"I've got all the nerve I need, young man! Don't you worry on that score. You'll find I've got nerve enough to deal with you."

Captain Bogue turned back from the door.

"Now, now, gentlemen," he began. "We don't need to have any row about this business."

"Your nerves are unstrung, Mr. Pickard," Kenton went on in an even tone. "Your judgment is at fault, and you're taking this matter of the gold on the steward entirely too seriously, if you—"

Pickard fairly hurled the coin on the matting.

"I don't have to ask you what is serious," he declared, his face turning pale again. "I've got my own reason for being serious, and to change conditions a little, I've started in fooling you. You've had your own way long enough in my affairs, but you haven't fooled me this time about how Ho Seng got that gold."

"You know where he got it?" demanded Bogue.

Pickard slipped his hand into his back pocket and drew out his revolver. He did not raise it, but held it close to his trouser leg. His thumb lifted the hammer.

Nobody moved, nobody showed the slightest alarm. And Pickard looked at each of them, a little surprised that they disregarded his weapon.

There was a moment of silence. Then Bogue held out his hands to Pickard in protest.

"We've had enough gunplay for one evening."

"Have we?" asked Pickard. "Maybe a little more would clear the air, Captain. I'm ready for it, if anybody around here feels that way."

Yates burst into laughter.

"Say, buddy, anybody around here was afraid of you, you'd be dead a'ready, pullin' a gat like you was posin' for a slow motion picture. I'd say you never seen any guns drawed for business purposes."

Pickard glared at him, but made no reply.

"I wish you'd make one thing clear, Mr. Pickard," began Kenton. "You spoke of how Ho Seng got his gold piece, and you inferred that I knew—"

"Captain, arrest Kenton!" said Pickard.

"What for?" demanded Bogue.

"I'll tell you what for. And if he or Yates make a move, I'll kill the first one that stirs a hand!"

"Make your charge, sir," said Bogue.

"I charge both men here with conspiracy against the safety of this steamer, and—"

"Nonsense!" said Kenton. "Skipper, I believe the man's out of his head!"

"Listen to me, Bogue! That gold piece was not in the steward's purse at all! Kenton had it in his hand all the time, and he palmed it into the purse. It's the second sweated coin that this man who calls himself Kenton has had. One of 'em he showed me in my office. And I charge both these men with being in the whole crooked deal with Tsang."

Kenton laughed quietly.

"You'll have a hard time to prove that, Mr. Pickard."

"NOW, look here," said Bogue sharply. "You told me yourself, sir, that you got information about Tsang—"

"We won't go into that now," said Pickard.

Kenton turned to Captain Bogue.

"I'm willing to be arrested. I protest, of course, but I'll surrender."

"Me, too," said Yates. "Shoot the works, Skipper."

"I'll make no arrest," said Bogue. "These men have not done anything that I can hold 'em for."

"You'll never have a chance to disobey my orders again, Captain Bogue."

"Very good, sir. I'm still master of this vessel."

"I'm the owner's agent and in charge, Bogue."

"Not in matters of discipline or navigation. If these men were passengers, it might be different, but you brought 'em aboard yourself, and they're down on the articles. I'll remind you that we're not supposed to carry passengers, so these men are crew, legally."

"All right," said Pickard. "Then turn back for port, and I'll have the police."

"I don't intend to turn back to port."

Pickard's legs bent under him, and he stepped backward unsteadily. He encountered the transom seat and, thrown off balance, sat down heavily.

"Bogue, what's the meaning of this?" he demanded weakly.

Before the skipper could answer, Kenton and Yates closed in upon Pickard. He lifted his revolver, pulled the trigger, and thrust the weapon toward Kenton. There was only the click of the hammer on a dead primer.

As the two men seized Pickard's arms, Bogue darted forward and wrenched the revolver from Pickard's hand.

"So that's the way it works, eh?" said Pickard calmly. "All in together."

He lay back against the bulkhead, his eyes on Captain Bogue. He made no struggle against Kenton and Yates, who simply held his arms.

"I can't have you shooting up people," said Bogue. "But for the luck of that gun missing fire, you'd shot—"

"No use to explain, Skipper," said Pickard. "You knew all the time the gun was no good; you ought to, seeing that you gave it to me."

"You're just full of suspicions," said Bogue.

"More than suspicion, Captain Bogue. I know now why you shot that steward. You stopped his mouth with a bullet. You didn't want me to question him."

"Figure it out yourself," said Bogue. He took a large brass key from his pocket.

"We don't want to hurt you, Mr. Pickard," said Kenton, "and we don't want you to hurt yourself. You tried to shoot yourself once today, and we can't take chances."

"Oh, is that so, Mr. Kenton—who's got another name. You will lose a lot of sleep worrying about me! Bogue, let's have no more nonsense. I know what's happened."

"Looks that way," said Bogue dryly.

"I was trusted, and I fell down on the job. And I trusted you, because I'd done more for you than I've done for any other officer in the employ of the company. I never expected you to stand against me with a couple of crooks who're out to gather up a lot of loot. I can't complain there, either, but for me, they'd never have a chance to get their hands on it."

"You certainly are talking sense now, sir," said Bogue.

"I'm getting what I deserve," went on Pickard. "I can't very well criticise you, considering the hole I'm in. So you can go in for piracy, and be damned to you, Bogue!"

"Perhaps a good fat pile of gold puts us all off our course," said Bogue. "I like the looks of it and the sound of it clinking over a bar as well as anybody." He smiled.

"Say, have we got to hold him all night?" asked Yates.

"Let him have his say, that's all I'm waiting for," said the skipper. "You don't have to hold him."

Kenton and Yates backed away.

"THANKS!" said Pickard. He looked closely at Kenton. "So you and Captain Bogue didn't know one another until I introduced him, eh? And his loading was delayed until Tsang sailed! How nice it was worked!"

Kenton grinned.

"Oh, yes, the skipper and I had met before, Mr. Pickard."

"That's obvious. I presume it was in some shady gun running deal. I wish I'd kept in mind the old saying, 'Once a crook, always a crook.'"

"Don't be so cynical, sir. No, Mr. Kenton had nothing to do with gun

running." It was the captain answering.

"Maybe not," said Pickard. "He goes in for bigger game. But my guess is that he's got something on you, and you had to come in whether you liked it or not, so—"

"I came in of my own accord when I knew the size of the stake," said Bogue.

"Where do you think you'll get off when this gang of crooks get what they want?"

"I think I'm competent to get what's coming to me before I'm done with 'em," said Bogue.

Pickard gave a snort of disgust.

"That's interesting, coming from you, Bogue. You forget that I picked you up off the beach. And you stand with these crooks against me and against the company. You threw away your future—for piracy!"

The skipper shrugged.

"Seems to me, Mr. Pickard," he returned dryly, "that you've come damned close to standing against the company yourself. Eh? And throwing away your own future, to boot. Not for piracy, maybe, but for something not any too square. And I'd like to ask, who's going to charge *me* with piracy?"

"I know what you mean," Pickard replied. "You can dump me ashore, and I've got to incriminate myself to bring a charge against you. All right. I don't want to live, but if I do live, I intend to confess what I've done and take my medicine. I'll do it because I deserve to be punished, and also to land the three of you behind bars, where you belong. I mean what I say, so if you don't want me on your tail, better go ahead and kill me."

"Mr. Pickard," began Kenton soberly, "you're a good business man when you stick to business. But when you deal with crooks you're out of your depth. Tsang fooled you, and I walked into the Café of Ten Thousand Sublime Hopes an utter stranger to you, and you fell for my report that a chink had tried to poison you."

Pickard drew a gasping breath.

"You—rigged—that too?" he stammered.

"Sure! Nobody tried to poison your wine," Kenton went on. "But you were mixed up in a shady transaction, and so it was a pipe to make you jump to any tune I played. You lost your head, and you lost your judgment. You didn't have any more idea of what was going on then than you have any idea of what's going on around you now. In this kind of a game, Mr. Pickard, you're just a babe in the woods."

"You don't have to tell me that!" cried Pickard bitterly. "But it's plain enough that you've been well schooled in crookedness."

"I have," said Kenton, "and that schooling comes handy in dealing with men like you. But you're actually an honest man, Mr. Pickard. In fact, you're so honest that you're inclined to think everybody else is just as honest. Not a safe attitude of mind for a man who's handling large sums of money that belong to others."

"Honest man!" Pickard exclaimed under his breath. He let his head drop forward on his breast. "I wish you spoke the truth. But God knows I want to get the company's gold back! But I'm too late for that now! I took one too many wide chances."

HE SUDDENLY stood, wavering on his feet, a hand spread across eyes and forehead, as if he were visualising a scene which filled him with infinite mental anguish.

"It's been hell!" he said brokenly. "Worry—and death around any corner—and the shame that goes with being—such a—such a *fool!*"

Then, before any one of them could put out a hand, he was down, sprawled on the matted deck of the social hall.

The others stood for a moment staring at him. Kenton was the first to speak.

"He's just caved in from strain," he said.

"I seen plenty men drop cold like that, worryin' about zero hour at the front," said Yates.

Captain Bogue turned swiftly and unlocked the door of the large after cabin. He threw the door wide and snapped on the lights.

"We'll put him in here," he said. "He's in no shape to be running around loose now."

"Not with the fight we've got ahead of us," said Kenton. "But who's going to keep an eye on him? He's likely to kill himself when he comes out of this faint and find himself locked in there."

"Lay him in on this bunk, and I've got a couple of big chaps in the engine room who'll stay with him. Just watch him, until I turn 'em out, and I'll have a drink sent up." Bogue hurried away, and they heard him calling to somebody out on deck.

With Yates, Kenton lifted Pickard and they carried him into the cabin. He opened his eyes and stared at the light overhead for a minute. Then he closed them again, and sighed like a man too weary to live.

"You'll be all right when you've had a rest," said Kenton.

Pickard opened his eyes and stared at him.

"I'm as right now as I'll ever be. Just leave me alone," he said.

CHAPTER XVI

A SCHOONER HOVE TO

ROLLING with wide lurches that slammed doors below and swung her funnel through deep arcs, the *Tung-hai* lay athwart the path of the schooner *Rusa*. The smoke from the steamer's swaying funnel wrote absurdly twisted hieroglyphics against the first faint banners of blazing crimson in the eastern sky. The light lifted from the sea horizon like a hard wall.

The schooner was lying head to wind on the still gray sea, a quarter of a mile away. When she tried to pay off and fill, she always found the steamer moving slowly into her way. The great black bulk had been under her bows since the first of the morning light.

Captain Bogue and Kenton clung to the bridge rail, watching the schooner. Mr. Landon, unshaven and with his wet hair awry on his forehead, stood behind the wheel, close to the helmsman. The mate's bare feet, wide apart, held him steady. His limp knees bent and straightened with the plunging rolls of the vessel. The thin silk of his pink pajamas rattled in the wind against his legs, and he swore softly to himself after the manner of a man at prayer. His white uniform jacket was buttoned at the waistline, but flared open under his chin, revealing his hairy chest. He had evidently left his bunk in a hurry on a summons to the bridge.

The open mouthed Chinese helmsman had his round face set in puzzlement. He hung to the wheel spokes with no understanding of what was happening, trying to adjust his wits to the unbelievable fact that the white barbarians were determined to bring about a collision. He had a rag tied under his chin to keep the coils of his queue, which was flemished down neatly on his skull, in place.

The Chinese at the wheel of the *Rusa* attempted over and over again to bring his vessel on the wind without getting aback. When she paid off a little, and her headsails filled, the great bulk of the *Tung-hai* moved forward or astern, leaving no margin for clearance. Again he was forced to luff up into the wind.

In her last futile attempt to head away from the steamer, the schooner rested again, her bowsprit lifting gracefully and thrusting toward the southwest sky. Her headsails beat a sharp tattoo. She was close aboard the steamer now. Her fore and main fluttered like some giant's washing. The creak of her boom jaws came to the *Tung-hai* like the protests of an animal laboring to free itself from a trap. Men aboard her screamed and squealed and ran about waving their arms. The smoke rose from her galley stack and trailed aft in a long blue pennant.

From the boat deck of the steamer a whaleboat hung from davits swung outboard. Six of the crew were in the boat, four of them clinging to the falls, and waiting the pleasure of the half Chinese second mate, Mr. Ling. He stood by the

saloon deck rail, his pale face lifted to the bridge, waiting for the command from Captain Bogue to lower away.

The second mate wore a belt loosely strapped over his hips, with automatic pistols in a pair of holsters that swung jerkily like restrained pendulums to the roll of the vessel. The crimson enamel badge on his cap—the house flag in miniature of Benjamin Anderson and Company—at times caught some of the lifting light in the eastern sky and glowed like a wet ruby seen through a mist.

Mr. Ling chewed a piece of ginger root. His attitude was that of a man who had no faint thought of questioning the wisdom of his orders. He knew what his pistols were for, undoubtedly, just as he knew what the grappling irons and lines stowed in the boat had been prepared for. He had two hundred dollars under his belt, but it was not in his nature to show by the ghost of a smile his satisfaction with the morning's job. He understood the genesis of a lurking grin on the stolid faces of the six men in the boat. They had a hundred dollars each in their waist pouches—and he knew some of them were from Bias Bay; West River men, that is, who had more than once before risked meeting a man with a long knife on the execution ground. Piracy was no new thing to them. The only novelty for them now was that they had been paid in advance, with a promise of more when they had the schooner in tow.

On the quarter deck, outlined sharply against the southeast brightening sky, stood a lone figure beside a spider-like machine. The deck had been stripped of awnings and its rail was unshipped all around. Rows of belts, piled neatly and close at hand, were near Yates. The second machine gun, also bolted to the deck, was covered by a canvas hood.

THE EASTERN sky was beginning to blaze. The red banners of the new day burst almost to the zenith. The scene aboard the *Rusa* was revealed with startling clarity. At the taffrail stood a man in blue, balancing himself behind the man at the wheel, hands thrust into fluttering sleeves, and his yellow head topping the blue blouse. His queue lashed about like a snake that had made its fangs fast in his skull. Half clad yellow figures stood by the sheets, and the forecastle head held a group peering forward while they clung to the stays.

The vessels were dangerously close now.

"Mr. Ling," called Captain Bogue. "Tell 'em we intend to visit 'em with a boat."

The second mate put his hands to his mouth and cackled over the water separating steamer and schooner.

The man in the blue jacket waved his arms wildly, and his shrill voice came back in a prolonged sing-song of objection.

"That's Tsang Hun Lin, and he finds himself in a bit of a pickle this morning," said Kenton.

"The *Tung-hai's* no stranger to him, I'll bet," said Bogue. "He knows a company ship when he sees it."

Mr. Ling was grinning up to the bridge wing.

"He says that he wants nobody aboard, and that the outer barbarian will no longer bar the water road, and a few remarks that are not fit for passengers to hear."

"You tell him that we'll blow him out of the water road if he bothers our boat," instructed Bogue. "Point out to him and his crew that we've got a thousand shooter aft there, and that a man wouldn't be able to find him with a knitting needle in the wreckage after we're done."

Mr. Ling translated again. Tsang hopped about and screamed back in Chinese. And Mr. Ling reported his words.

"He says his men will fight any boat that comes alongside, and that they have guns for the business."

"Inform him that if he shoots at us, we'll kill all hands," said Bogue. "Tell the crew we're pirates, and mean business."

Kenton turned aft.

"Show 'em a sample of your stuff, Mike—just enough to make sure everybody aboard there'll hear the sad news. Don't hit anybody, a hot whiff across her whiskers!"

Yates waved a hand and bent over his machine. The air was ripped open with a steady drumming, and the sea boiled ahead of the *Rusa*.

Kenton yelled to the schooner.

"There's something, Tsang, that'll stir your tea for you."

THE SCHOONER'S crew fell silent at once. They were astounded at what had happened. Derisive laughter came from the steamer's foredeck as the Chinese crew noted the effect of the machine gun.

"Well, Skipper, it looks as if we're about ready to collect," said Kenton. He stepped into the chartroom and picked up a belt which had attached to it a pair of automatic pistols in holsters. He strapped the belt over his white coat, inspected the pockets which held extra magazines and pulled an officer's cap down over his forehead with a cocky slant.

"I'd just as soon you'd keep out of it," said Bogue.

Mr. Landon gave Kenton a curious glance, and then turned to Bogue.

"You two mebbe know what you're doin', but I wish to hell I was out of here. I'm obeyin' orders, sir, but they've only got to do with the *Tung-hai*. I got no hand in that!" He waved a fist in the direction of the *Rusa*.

Bogue laughed.

"You're not responsible, Mr. Landon. Just bear in mind that Mr. Pickard told you to obey my orders, no matter how crazy they might sound."

"Where is Mr. Pickard, anyhow? He ought to be around to see what's goin' on, him bein' the company man aboard."

"He doesn't want to witness anything, that's why he's not around," said Bogue. "And you don't need to watch the boat, either, if you don't want to."

Landon turned away.

"Looks like somebody's fixin' to git hung," he said disgustedly.

Captain Bogue turned the engine room telegraph to "slow ahead" and gave an order to the wheel. The steamer moved forward again. Her head swung to starboard to cross the bows of the schooner and come down on her beam.

Kenton moved closer to the skipper.

"You didn't find out what Ho Seng stabbed that seaman for, did you?"

"Yes. It's an old row of some sort. Tan Yu was delirious in his sickness, and came for the steward, that's all. And Ho Seng decided to finish him off. But what I can't understand is why you planted that gold piece on the steward after I shot him."

Kenton grinned.

"It struck me as a good time to come to the break with Pickard. His talk with you showed that he was suspicious of me, and as we had him there in the social hall, it was the best possible time to lock him up while we were all together. I didn't expect him to cave in. But it worked out all right."

"Yes. No saying what he'd do if he was loose around the decks now."

"I'd better go down and join Mr. Ling," said Kenton. "It's about time we went aboard the *Rusa*."

Bogue's look became worried.

"Wish you'd stay aboard here and let the boat party run that show. I'd be in a nice mess if you got hurt, and I'd have to explain."

"It's my job to get aboard that schooner," said Kenton. "I'll need to make sure, Skipper. You come along when we've mopped things up." He gave Bogue a thrust in the ribs, grinned and turned to the ladder.

"All right, Mr. Ling," said Kenton, when he reached the saloon deck.

Ling pointed to the bow of the boat. Kenton climbed into the bows, Ling got into the stern sheets and the seamen began to chant in unison as they lowered away.

CHAPTER XVII

YATES IN ACTION

"GIVE 'em a few rolls off your drum, Mike!" called Kenton, when the boat was clear of the steamer and heading away to the *Rusa*.

Again the mighty rattle of the machine gun broke on the morning with red flashes and swift spurts of wispy smoke. Then a diagonal line of white ribbons rose in the water ahead of the schooner like a flight of flying fish lifting for the surface.

Bells clanged in the engine room of the *Tung-hai*. As her head swung, her deep rolling changed to a gentle lifting of her bows as she began to meet the swells. She was turning to bring the schooner abeam after crossing her bows.

The Chinese at the wheel of the *Rusa* saw his chance. He put his helm over and filled his head sails. The canvas of the fore and main sails snapped full as she paid off in an attempt to shoot past the stern of the steamer.

Bogue held up his hand to Yates.

"Take the rags off her!" he ordered.

Another belt of bullets cut loose, and this time they sliced through sails and rigging, and like a knife cut a gash from head sails to the leech of the main. The old canvas could not stand the strain. The foresail split at the close reef band and whittered out in raggy pennants from gaff above and boom below. The mainsail tore apart like wet paper. The gaff swung downward with a crash, the halyards carrying away. The topsail bellied out to leeward and the gaff thrashed about, wrecking more running rigging.

The schooner fell off with a wide yaw. The man at the wheel got her back into the wind. The crew yelled in mad frenzy.

Captain Bogue leaned idly against the bridge rail near the worried mate and the staring helmsman.

"Lyle gun ready?" Bogue asked Landon.

"Yes, sir," said the mate.

"Then stand by to shoot a line over her."

Landon went aft on the boat deck. On the foredeck a great hawser was being winched up and laid in long hakes.

Kenton, looking back, could see a face in an open porthole of the after cabin. It was Pickard.

The boat drew alongside the schooner, then sheered off a little. Tsang had disappeared below. Now he jumped up through the companionway. He moved to the taffrail, cradling a rifle in his arms. He swung the muzzle outboard and began pumping bullets. They spat into the water a good fifty yards from the boat.

"He's most likely shut his eyes while he fired the old repeater," laughed Kenton.

"He's got a few more in it," cautioned Mr. Ling, "but we might as well let him empty the magazine."

Tsang yelled something. Then he slewed the rifle barrel up to the sky and let loose a few more scattering shots into the schooner's top hamper. When he could get no more results after a clumsy attempt to pump the gun, he bent forward and looked over the sea to ascertain the damage.

A dozen Chinese gathered at the bulwarks, chattering. Kenton lifted his hand and signaled Yates. The machine gun fired high into the topmasts of the schooner, and Kenton and Ling fired a couple of shots over the crew. They bolted for the forecastle and fought to get down through the scuttle. Tsang threw away his rifle and darted below. The man at the wheel yelled madly, but stuck to his post.

The boat shot in close. A grappling hook went over the bulwarks. Then another, and the boat was fast, fore and aft. Mr. Ling got a wire ladder over the low freeboard and, watching his chance, scrambled up the side as the schooner rolled away from him. Kenton followed, with five of the six men in the boat close behind. Two were armed with short shotguns and the others with knives.

WITH revolvers ready, Ling faced forward and Kenton aft. The deck appeared to be deserted, except for the man at the wheel. But as Ling moved toward the bows a Chinese, hiding in a mess of broken

gear near the fore hatch, leaped up and launched a pole at the second mate.

Ling cried a warning, and Kenton dodged. Mr. Ling threw up his revolver, but did not fire, for the yellow man ran swiftly to the forecastle and hurled himself down through the open scuttle where faces peered up amid a wild chattering.

They heard soft shod feet running on the quarter deck, and turned aft. Tsang came rushing toward the break of the deck, one hand holding a long revolver. He stopped suddenly and opened his mouth. He said something in English which Kenton did not understand and, with a show of his white teeth, the old Chinese blazed away. The bullet struck into the deck close to Kenton.

As Tsang was trying to fire again, Mr. Ling fired upward. Kenton saw the blue bloused figure stagger backward and fall. For a minute Tsang did not move, then he crawled forward to the steps leading to the main deck, the revolver still in his hand. He unwittingly pulled the trigger, and the weapon leaped from his grasp. As the schooner's stern lifted high under a swell, Tsang skidded forward and toppled from the quarter deck. He fell in the waterways under the bulwarks, where he lay on his face without any movement.

"He's dead," said Ling.

"And that was a close call for me," said Kenton. "But for you, he might have hit me the next time."

Ling grinned, and spoke to the boat's men, sending them forward to make sure the crew did not come up from the forecastle. Then they found the *Rusa's* helmsman hiding behind the wheelbox. Ling ordered him back to the wheel.

They dropped below. There was only a frightened cook, shielding himself with a dishpan. He was at bay in his tiny galley, with a carving knife as a weapon. Kenton disarmed him and told him to stay in the galley. Ling dumped a kettle of boiling soup into the fire to put it out, for the schooner was taking deep rolls.

"The man at the wheel thinks we're an odd lot of pirates," said Ling with a laugh. "Chinks don't expect to live when their own people go in for this business. He can't understand why we didn't kill him."

Back on deck, they saw Mr. Landon aboard the *Tung-hai* standing ready at the Lyle gun. Kenton signaled the skipper, the gun spoke, and a line came spiraling at a high angle. It fell across the *Rusa* abaft the foremast, and Ling's men made it fast; aboard the steamer some of the crew were already bending the end of the big towing hawser to a trailing line.

The blazing sun was now well up. A second boat was being made ready to put off from the *Tung-hai*. Bogue, having turned the bridge over to Landon, was urging Pickard into the boat. The latter appeared to be dazed, and had to be helped into the boat.

IN THE wait for the captain's boat, Kenton went down to where Tsang lay and lifted him up against the bulwarks. Then Kenton discovered that Tsang was still alive. His eyes were tightly shut, but suddenly he groped for Kenton's legs. Blood was trickling from a corner of his mouth. A stain on the front of the blue jacket showed where Ling's bullet had entered his breast.

"Tsang Hun Lin!" said Kenton. "Open your eyes!"

The Chinese only moaned. Kenton tore a large cloth from the remnant of the foresail that was bellying under the boom, folded it to make a pillow and thrust it under Tsang's head. Then Kenton got the cook out of the galley, and they brought a green bottle filled with native wine. Given a mouthful of the liquor, Tsang only coughed and strangled, spewing out his false teeth upon the deck.

The sight even drew Ling's pity.

"Poor devil!" he said. "Too bad I had to shoot him."

"Yes," said Kenton, "but I saw him kill a couple of men as you or I would kill fleas. He's a bad bird, this chap, but he won't last long. He's got his ticket right enough."

They lifted him up on a corner of the after hatch and went to the side to help

Bogue's boat make fast. The crew of the first boat was chanting as they walked round the capstan, bringing over the hawser.

Pickard, helped up the ladder, came slowly over the side. His face was unshaven, his eyes weary and staring, his features deeply lined, his lips half open. He had torn his coat off in the boat. When he felt the *Rusa* under his feet, he took a few uncertain steps, like a man in a dream. He appeared not to know that Kenton was beside him, but the figure of Tsang drew his attention. Slowly he went to stand at the coaming beside the old Chinese, who was breathing with difficulty, his arms stretched out at his sides.

Captain Bogue shook hands with Kenton.

"You made short work of it," he said, and nodded his approval to Mr. Ling.

"We'll want our friend to have a look below," said Kenton, turning to Pickard.

The skipper had noted the raffle of canvas and broken running rigging cluttering the schooner's decks.

"Mr. Ling," he said, "have the men I brought strip the rags off her and clear up the mess. And relieve that chink at the wheel. He's steering like a blind man catching crickets!"

Bogue moved over near Pickard and gazed down on Tsang.

"So that's the man who started it all, is it, Mr. Pickard?"

Pickard's eyes roved over the prostrate body. He apparently felt no special satisfaction at seeing Tsang dying. He sighed, and nodded to Bogue.

"He'd swap a ton of minted gold just now to have that ounce of lead out of him," said Bogue. "Well, he'd ha' done better in this world with fewer brains and a brass vest."

KENTON, ax in hand, was hammering at a batten wedge on the far side of the hatch. Bogue went and lent a hand to get the tarpaulin turned back. They lifted one of the hatch covers at the corner of the coaming. The end of the hawser was coming home. Mr. Ling dragged the sea ladder to the hatch opening. While the ladder was being secured, one end dropped into the hold, Bogue went forward to have a look at the towing bitts.

Kenton addressed Pickard—

"I want you to come below with us to inspect certain cargo."

For the first time Pickard turned his look on the younger man. He drew back a little.

"Why torment me?" he asked. "You've got things your own way now."

Bogue rejoined them.

"Come, Mr. Pickard. You can be of help to us. You know what I mean. We want you to identify some samples."

"What can I do about it?" asked Pickard wearily.

"We want you to identify what went through your hands."

Pickard straightened with something of his former dignity, and the lines of his face set.

"No. I won't help you in any way. If I can't put the gold back into the company's vaults, I won't look at it."

"Aw, play along with us!" insisted the captain. "We'll set you ashore—"

Kenton broke in eagerly:

"And give you a stake that'll start you all over in life."

Pickard reddened with swift anger.

"That remark of yours, Mr. Kenton, shows how little you understand the way I got into this business. I've been an idiot, playing a risky game with Chinese, and I've lost funds that I'm responsible for. But make no mistake about me, either of you. I'm no crook. I don't want your stake to start life again. Not with divided loot."

Kenton nodded.

"Guess you mean it, too," he admitted. "Just the same, you must see what's below here." He took his flashlight from a pocket and shot a beam under him, then swung to the ladder. "Come, Mr. Pickard," he added firmly. It was an order. "Better come willingly. If you don't, we'll have you lowered down."

The blood receded from Pickard's face.

"I think I understand what you're driving at," he replied. "You're going to keep me a prisoner aboard here, in the hold." At once he yielded. "In that case I'll go, and you can leave me there when you've got the gold and you're ready to sink her. It's the ending I deserve."

He moved to the hatch opening, paused for a moment to glance at the dying Tsang. Then he looked out over the sea and into the sky, like a man taking a last look at the world. Finally he swung his feet down to the ladder and followed Kenton. After him went Bogue.

CHAPTER XVIII

"PUN-JA-MIN AN-TA-SUN"

EXCEPT for the great shaft of sunlight spilling down through the opening overhead and washing from side to side with the roll of the schooner, the hold was a place of dim shadows and dank air.

A huge mess of dunnage was piled on the bottom, as high as the upper edge of the keel. There was a deep litter of coconut husks, hemp clippings of the waste variety, pieces of boards and a quantity of musty matting. To the casual observer, the *Rusa* had no cargo.

Pickard threw himself down on the matting, sickened by the motion of the vessel and the strong odors of the hold. Dejected, beaten and forlorn, he did not even watch while Bogue played the battery light, and Kenton threw aside some pieces of hemp that were the upper covering of the dunnage.

In a few minutes the latter came upon the round of a small cask, such as might be used for a water breaker in boats. It was of great weight, but with the skipper helping, they managed to get the cask on top of the dunnage that had hidden it. Then Kenton took the ax and chopped at the rusty hoops until he had them hacked through. They snapped, and one blow knocked out the head of the cask. The small barrel collapsed.

"There you are!" cried Kenton triumphantly.

Between the heavy staves the beam of the flashlight made the contents glimmer yellowly. He kicked aside the broken top and staves and plunged his hands into quarts of gold coins.

Bogue swore softly under his breath.

"We're right!" he exclaimed. "That's real money, and no hocus about it!"

"Didn't I tell you!" exulted Kenton. "Give me the light a second. See! Here's the right date! Skipper, there's no mistake about it!"

"You sure made a proper landfall," agreed Bogue. "When it comes to clicking according to report, you can put it across!"

He cleared away more dunnage, and they located a dozen additional casks. Each, as he tried its weight, found it too heavy for his single strength.

They went back to the broken cask, Kenton holding the light.

"The coins in this one aren't sweated," he pointed out. "Look here! Mint new! Skipper, we can take this stuff aboard easy enough. We'll bring it up in double sacks, and who'll know what it is?"

Before Bogue could reply, there came a a cry from overhead.

"Look below!"

It was Mr. Ling's voice. Glancing up into the blinding sunlight, Kenton and the captain saw a shadow darken the edges of the hatch opening. Next appeared the head of a man, dropping downward, and a clutching hand. Something struck Kenton upon the face. He leaped backward, taking Bogue with him.

The shadow above grew swiftly larger. There was a scrambling on the hatch, the sound of booted feet running over the deck, a heavy dull blow on the tarpaulin overhead as somebody arrived in a leap. That same instant, a body came hurtling down, landing in the soft dunnage under the hatch.

It was Tsang.

PICKARD rose. As he and the other two white men stared down at the Chinese, stretched on his back, all saw the shadows of Ling's fingers on the prostrate figure, futilely grasping after Tsang's legs.

The eyes of the mender of broken wheels were open now. He withdrew them from the frightened face of Mr. Ling, staring down at him, to the faces of the watching trio. Except for the dried stain at one side of his toothless mouth, he did not look to be injured. He lay very quiet, moving his lower jaw, as if trying to speak.

"What does he want to say?" asked Kenton.

Mr. Ling shouted down from the hatch.

"He crawled over—and fell before I could—"

"It's all right," called Captain Bogue. "Go back to the wheel."

Once more Tsang's lower jaw moved. He raised a thin hand to point to Kenton. But the dying man could not make his tongue frame his words.

Kenton dropped to his knees.

"Tsang," he said, "you're done with gold. You're going to meet your illustrious ancestors."

A faint smile softened the wan saffron of Tsang's cheeks. He tried to nod. Then he suddenly spoke, in a loud whisper.

"Even a yellow man wishes to die with clean fingers," he said. "I greatly rejoice—that you will have the gold—it will go back—"

Pickard gave an exclamation of disgust.

"Don't fool yourself, Tsang!" he cried. "I'm not here to take the gold. You lost it to a couple of pirates when you jumped out."

The eyelids of the Chinese fluttered. He laid his hand in Kenton's, and smiled again.

"*Pun-Ja-Min*," he whispered, "*An-Ta-Sun*."

"Yes, I wish Benjamin Anderson had it, too," said Pickard. "But I can't get it back to him—even by dying—any more than you can. So your fingers are not so clean as you'd like, Tsang."

Kenton stood up and grasped Pickard by the arm.

"Listen to me, Mr. Pickard. I've played a dangerous game to get my hands on this gold. My orders were to give you a grilling, and such a lesson as you'd never forget, so—"

Pickard wavered on his feet.

"*You*—had orders! *Who*—"

Kenton checked him abruptly.

"Tsang's beat you to it. My job was to fool you, and I could have grabbed this gold before it got out of port. But we wanted no police, no newspaper publicity, no scandal that'd hurt the company. You know how severe the Old Man can be."

Now Pickard clutched at Kenton's coat.

"What Old Man?" he shouted. "Who're you talking about?"

He had suddenly caught a hint of the truth. He turned paler than the dying man by his feet.

"You know, Pickard. Father's severe. But he can forgive. He's transferring you to the San Francisco office." He stopped and leaned down to Tsang. "You know—the gold's safe. You're right, Tsang—I'm Benjamin Anderson, junior."

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Fair Play

IN THE NEXT issue of *Adventure*, February 1, the winners of the Dumas contest will be announced. Comrade Paddock rebukes me for explaining to Brother Green (November 15) that of course the contest is fair and honest from start to finish. He also chides Brother Green for asking such a question as whether *Adventure* will be fair and honest.

Well, Brother Green, we stand corrected. It goes without saying, that the best man wins.

Speaking, I am sure, for quite a number of chaps who've squatted around the Camp-Fire since some years back and have wandered into the far places with such guides as Mundy, Friel, Tuttle and a lot of others, I feel sort of sorry for this chap Green who was responsible for the letter that showed up in Camp-Fire, November 15th issue. And I'm a bit sore at Comrade Green too. I resent that letter of his.

Mr. Rud was rather more lenient with Brother Green than I'll be. He said that perhaps this Green fellow has reason to ask questions and while I'll grant the gentleman may ask all the questions he wants to, he ought to be careful of whom he asks them.

Probably your editorial comment on the matter, Mr. Rud, was written for the newcomers. I hope you realized that the gang of us that has sort of grown up with *Adventure* didn't need any comment at all. As far as we're concerned you could have saved the space, just printed the letter out of fairness to Brother Green and headed it, "You tell him the answer, Brothers."

And how I, for one, would tell him! I've got a hunch that this man from Chicago hasn't been with us long. I'm afraid he hasn't been around the Camp-Fire and rubbed elbows long enough to get acquainted with the gang. I don't imagine he has ever gone without a meal in order to pay for a copy of *Adventure*. Because if he had he wouldn't have to be told that the magazine and everyone connected with it are square shooters and that there's a

sizable crowd who buy the magazine every two weeks that is going to rare up on its collective hind legs when somebody starts asking these here now foolish questions. A legitimate question—yes. But not this sort!

Move yourself in nearer the fire, Brother Green, and soak up some of the heat. I'll guarantee it won't take long before you'll wish you'd never sent in that letter, or else you're incorrigibly skeptical. Am I right, Brothers?

Did you hear that shout, Brother Green?—W. EARL PADDOCK, 180 Lincoln St., Worcester, Mass.

Accolade

IN THE VOLUME of "Best Short Stories", brought out by the *New York World* for 1928, will appear "Pioneer" by Harry G. Huse, published in the November 15th issue of *Adventure*.

Mr. Huse is represented in this present number; and longer humorous tales from his pen are scheduled for later issues of *Adventure*.

HOT WHEELS

(As Told by a "Tommy Man")

We were cleaving through the combers like a keen knife cuts through cheese;
Not a signal light was showing on the black and oily seas:
For we knew the Coast Guard cutters would be watching for us well——
Bill had sworn to land his liquor in Miami or in hell.
Then the dark was split asunder by a sudden shaft of light,
And a one-pound shell went screaming past our prow into the night!

They had heard our motor's throbbing, scare and stop us, was their play;
But for once it wasn't written they would take the trick that way!

"Full ahead!" Bill Conner bellowed, and we felt our speed boat jump,
And we knew that if they caught us they would surely have to hump!

"Boys," said Bill, "they'll never touch us with that popgun they've got there.
"If they catch us, though, and board us, let 'em come up fair and square:
"Let 'em come up where we want 'em, put themselves right on the spot;
"Then, Professor, you and Dooley, use your Thompsons, run 'em hot!
"This is one boat-load of likker that they sure won't sell or swill:
"Boys, we owe 'em lots of trouble; what you say we square the bill?"

We were game, from scowling pilot down to oilstained engineer,
Game with cold nerve and hot whisky, game with fury and with fear.
Not a man but knew his capture would mean more than just a jam,
For a part of us were card-boys and the rest were on the lam!

I had been paroled in April—made just three of "three to ten";
If I got caught *looking* crooked it meant going up again.
Not for mine! I hugged my Thompson, slipped the safety off and on:
But we lost the cutter somehow, and came in before the dawn.

We unloaded in a hurry, stored the stuff in Bill's café;
Right on Flagler Street the joint is: safe, but say! he has to pay!

Then he called me off and whispered, "Prof, I've got to send a car
"To a burg named Nard, in Georgia; just past Macon, not so far.

"Guy up there wants thirty cases, says he wants it toot de sweet:
"Two Bit's doping up the Fronty: now, be careful with your heat:
"Watch the county cops in Georgia: and be sure you keep your eyes
"Peeled for Dago Pete and Lefty, for I've got a hunch they're wise.
"They are sore, and they are poison; they may try to queer the game:
"If they do—why use the Tommy; it's a tough bird *that* won't tame!
"Get what shuteye you are able till you hit the Georgia line:
"Here's two century notes—expenses. Well, I guess you'll make it fine."

Two Bit's Frontenac was purring like a lazy tiger cat:
Special built for just our business, it was long and low, and sat
On its wheels just like a panther poised in readiness to spring,
Like a snake coiled up for striking, like a hawk with eager wing.

As we rolled away towards Georgia I said, "Well, I need a nap,
"And I'm going to try to get one if it means I take a rap.
"Keep your eyes wide open, Two Bit; watch for Lefty and for Pete."
And with that I was in dreamland on the Spanish leather seat.

Well, it hardly seemed a minute till he poked me in the side,
Then I saw a sign said "Jasper" and my peepers opened wide.
Two Bit caught my look of question and he shot an answer quick,
"Bill picked out this route, Professor; fooling Dago was the trick.
"We're to go across at Jennings; at Valdosta eat a bite;
"Go through Tifton, Cordele, Macon; be in Nard by ten tonight."

I was ready for the feed-bag; for I'd slept a solid day;
So we halted in Valdosta and we put two steaks away.
It was six when we re-started, but the summer days were long,
And for quite a while the sunlight would be shining bright and strong.

As we hit the Dixie Highway a big Dusenberg sedan
Came in sight, and I saw in it Lefty, Pete, and one more man.
Two Bit glimpsed 'em in his mirror and he laid his big foot down;
"Got your spurs?" he hollered at me. "Put 'em on, let's go to town!"

Say, we rode! The asphalt pavement was as rough as corduroy,
But the way our Fronty took it was a glory and a joy!
When we hit the city limits of a town we had to slow,
But the Dusenberg did likewise, so that break was square, you know.

It was eighty on the stretches, it was sixty on the curves:
Oh, it wasn't any rest-cure for a guy with shaky nerves!
But I've always had a feeling it was good to be alive
When the straight-away lies open and you climb to ninety-five,
For the very blood inside me turns to champagne, extra dry,
When a racing car seems ready to sprout pluméd wings and fly!
When a heavy-footed driver holds the throttle on the floor
And the wind outscreams the thunder of a speed-mad motor's roar!

Ninety-five! I swear we hit it! But the Dusenberg held on;
If they came up level with us, why I knew that we were gone.

They were coming, too, so help me! Inch by inch and yard by yard!
Ugly faced gorillas, redhots! Well, Bill hired me for a guard;
So I got my Thompson ready and I climbed in the tonneau:
"Boys," I thinks, "start up the music, I am sure all set to go!"

I remembered how they'd butchered Kansas Slim and stole his load,
And the recollection lashed me like an anger-wielded goad:
They had shot the kid to pieces, then poured on the gasoline——
Memories of that kind, buddy, make a fellow mighty mean!

Dago Pete dragged out his cannon. "Good!" I gritted; then he fires,
And I ricochet an answer off the pavement to his tires.

Lefty (he was driving) weakened, couldn't hold the wrenching wheel,
And the lunging, plunging speedster was their sepulchre of steel!
When I eased my trigger-finger lay by the highway's side
Just a flaming mass of flotsam flung from Fury's fatal tide!

Two Bit grinned once when I told him, then his face grew grim and gray:
"Clever work," he said, "Professor. If we're caught, though, hell's to pay."

Then—we rode! Like winged Pegasus with his white mane tossing high!
Like chain-lightning chasing thunder through the starways of the sky!

Roared through Tifton like a rocket, shot past Ashburn like a star;
At Cordele a speedcop chased us—well, he didn't follow far!
Left another in Vienna like his gears were hung in low;
Then we scorched the streets of Macon—twenty miles left yet to go!

Phoned ahead, somebody must have, for there swung out on our tail
Four big bulls on motorcycles, bloodhounds hot upon our trail.

Two Bit cursed. I felt like groaning. This was hell, and sure enough!
On the crooked road our Fronty couldn't get to strut her stuff.
Wouldn't do to let 'em take us—me out under a parole,
Two Bit on the lam for murder; we were in an awful hole.
Never do to gun *those* bullies, Georgia worships Johnny Law:
Then I looked far down the highway. Judas Priest! and what I saw!
Over the Oconee River was a bridge that as I gazed
Parted in mid-section—*a steel draw-bridge, being raised!*

Well, I felt I had the office that the game would end right here,
And somehow I didn't mind much, just got calm and cold and clear.
If the cards are set against you, what's the odds? Why let 'em fall—
Aces, deuces, jacks and joker. Fate's the dealer. Play 'em all!

"Hold it, kid" I said to Two Bit: "here is where the showdown comes.
"We'll let Tommy do our talking; salivate those dirty bums."

But he went, I thought, stark crazy, for he gave the bus the gun:
Down the grade we streaked, a comet, speeding swifter than the sun!

Up the swaying, steepening bridgeway—I was set like steel to die——
Say! don't ever let 'em tell you that a Frontenac can't *fly!*

Up the lip of Death, and *over!* Over all that lay beneath,
Concrete piles and castiron girders—ghastly, grinning, greedy teeth,
Death's-head teeth that never touched us, for we cleared the grim gap wide;
Made a perfect four-point landing! Cops all on the other side!

That was *that*. The rest was gravy, served out with a silver spoon,
For the road was clear before us and our motor still in tune.
Just the same, I'll have to own it, I was breathing pretty hard,
When our headlights lit the street signs of the sleepy town of Nard;
And I thanked the faithful Fronty, with its hot wheels all a-smoke,
As we handed out our cargo—not a single bottle broke!

—COURTNEY McCURDY

Criticism

MANY of the comrades about the Camp-Fire object to the constant criticism of one thing and another by sticklers for accuracy. Many other comrades, however, like nothing better than the scrimmage for the last word.

Debates like *bullets vs. cartridges* do go on all the time. Personally I enjoy ushering the debaters up front where we can all hear—and learn.

Just finished reading "Table Stakes" by Allan Vaughan Elston. He sure is careless about details. Cartridges are never called bullets by any but greenhorns.

Did you ever try to saw a firing pin off a Colt? And with an old hacksaw that was being used for sawing bones! It is impossible even with the best blade made because firing pins are made of tool steel and case hardened so that they are harder than a saw blade. And if it were possible the noise of sawing would have warned those in the other room. Also the only Colts made in the .45 caliber are the new Service double action and the Single Action Army. The latter is the most popular hand gun in the cattle country. Very few double actions are in use, even today. The cylinder in the single action is held in with a pin and it is not possible to break it open. To remove cylinder a latch in front of frame must be pushed in and cylinder pin pulled out of frame. Also hammer must be half cocked and loading latch opened. So it is taken for granted all of the characters in the story were armed with double action guns. Must have been a "dude" ranch.

I do not want Mr. Elston to be offended by this letter, as my criticism is offered in a friendly vein. We're not all cranks. Everybody to his trade, and mine is not letter writing.—RALPH M. SYNDER, Park Ridge, Illinois.

Reply by Mr. Elston:

Dear Mr. Snyder,

I was very much interested in your able letter to the editor of *Adventure*, referring to my story, "Table Stakes," which was forwarded to the author for reply. Your letter is a first class article on gunware, instructive to me on many points, and you are to be congratulated on it.

In defense of my own story, however, please allow me to take up your three criticisms of "detail," which are:

1. "Cartridges are never called bullets by any but greenhorns."
2. Did you ever try to saw a firing pin off a Colt?"
3. "The noise of sawing would be heard in the next room."

1. I contend that exactly the opposite is true. The old-time, sourdough plainsman or cowpuncher would say bullet more often than cartridge when referring to short arm ammunition, although he would almost invariably say "cartridge" or "ca'tridge," when referring to rifle ammunition. He would never say "shell" except in two connections: he would speak of an "empty shell" or a "box o' shells" bought at the hardware store.

I have owned a cattle ranch near the New Mexico-Colorado line all my life. For many years I operated it from the saddle. I regret to say that no neighborhood in the Southwest has a tougher history than my own range, in the matter of hard-boiled gunplay. When I went there first in 1897 as a 10 year old boy my father was employing five ranch hands. Three of the five have since gone to the State pen for life for range killings. Even last summer, in the year 1927, there were three range killings within ten miles. The rancher who adjoins me on one side rode over to the next layout beyond him and shot a ranchman to death over a range dispute. The

smoke had hardly cleared from that when news came to us that a very estimable and popular neighbor near Trinchera, within a very few miles of the exact spot on which I laid "Table Stakes," engaged in an even break .45 gun duel with one of his hands and both were killed. You will understand from this that the Trinchera range is not one of dude ranches. They load their pistols with bullets and their rifles with cartridges.

Ed Kane, the sheriff in "Table Stakes," was deputy sheriff when his father was sheriff of the county, and Ed Kane is his real name. He is my only fiction character whose name I do not disguise; he is one of my closest friends. Besides being a range deputy, he for years owned and operated a ranch on Trinchera Creek. I have used him fictionally in yarns sold to *Adventure, Everybody's, Short Stories, Frontier* and *West*. The point is that he says "bullets" without blushing, and has burned a great many of them.

2. On this point I fear you have me in something of a hole, and I am going to crawl out of it on a technicality. Your promise is: "Did you ever try to saw a firing pin off a Colt?"

No, I didn't, although I have tried sawing a steel axle in two and succeeded. In Table Stakes I did not have Kane saw the firing pin off a *Colt*. Read the story again. There are six-guns in the story. I described Kane's gun as a .45 Colt. But Kane did not saw the firing pin off his own gun. It was the other five guns which he so mutilated. The make of these other five guns was very carefully omitted. For all you and I know they may have been of some cheap or inferior manufacture. You see I was anticipating your criticism even while I wrote the story. Neither did I say "old hack saw," as you quote. I said "hack saw." The fact that some cowboy had brought it up from the tool shed to saw a ham with would not necessarily keep it from being the finest or hardest hack saw ever made, nor would such a misuse of it spoil it. I have even known sawyers to grease a saw blade with a bacon rind to improve its purpose. But admit me this, anyway: firing pins are of diminutive diameter; their points have been known to be broken off without the use of either saw or file; and we know that some very fine hack saws have been made in the history of industry, and some very poor guns.

3. That Trinchera country was built up by Mexicans before the advent of gringos. All the outbuildings and bunk shacks on my own ranch, and on my neighbor's, are adobe. The outer walls are two 4x12x12 bricks thick, that is they are two feet thick. The interior walls are one 4x12x12 brick thick, are a foot thick. Fairly sound proof. Kane was in the next room, with the door closed. We told the story from the single viewpoint, keeping the scene in the main bunk room all the while. We did not follow Kane into the kitchen and observe his conduct. We do not know whether or not he stepped out of the rear kitchen door to perform his sawings. We do know, however, that the rain was beating a constant tattoo on the roof. And let me assure you, Mr. Snyder, that your criticism number three was one of the reasons why it was raining that day.

1. Returning to criticism one I forgot to say that there was still another reason why I used "bullets" and "cartridges" interchangeably. The term bullet, cartridge or shell occurs 63 times in the story. Any constant use of a single one of the three would have become monotonous from a standpoint of technique, and made bad reading. That point alone would permit the diversification.

But the net result of your criticism is a help to me, and I thank you for it. It is such letters as yours which keep both writers and editors constantly on the *qui vive* for accuracy. I wish you lived in the same town as I do, because I am frequently stumped on points concerning the intricacies of gunware on which your intimate knowledge would be beneficial.—ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON.

Contest

ON DECEMBER FIRST the lists closed for *Adventure's* serial novel essay contest. And what a response! Several thousand manuscripts have been received; the exact number will be announced next issue—when the essays, names and addresses of the five prize-winners will appear in Camp-Fire.

Frankly, at the date of this writing (December sixth), making an absolutely just award looks like a task for five-six post-graduate Solomons, rather than mere editors. Thus far I have read several hundred of the contributions, and the great majority of them are keen, spicy and intelligent. They vary all the way from dramatic meetings in Hades between Bedford-Jones "and Dumas and the other men he has wronged" (!), to blank verse and heroic couplet. Of course the essays—whether flattering or excoriating—will have the call, however.

By the time copy for our next Camp-Fire goes down to the composing room, I suspect that there will be one gang of magazine editors who know fully as much concerning the 1200 novels published under the name of Dumas, as that illustrious Frenchman himself ever knew . . .

—ANTHONY M. RUD

ASK *Adventure*

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Acorn Meal

AFTER the removal of the tannin, the fruit of the oak makes a very satisfactory food commodity.

Request:—"I have just read a short article about the early Indians of California and how their principle food was an acorn meal. How can we prepare acorns to get some of the bitter taste (tannin) out of them? Also how did the Indians prepare this meal for food?" —WM. R. TULLOS, Chicago, Ill.

Reply, by Mr. Arthur Woodward:—It is quite true that many of the California tribes came to depend upon acorn meal as one of their principle means of sustenance, and the preparation of the seeds entailed quite a bit of labor.

In the first place, the acorns used were of various sorts. Among the Hupa of Northern California, the acorns of the tanbark oak, *Quercus densiflora,* were preferred above all others, although the species, *Garryana californica,* and *chrysolepis* were used if needed. In the southern part of the State, among the Cahuilla and neighboring tribes, the largest and most palatable acorn being that of the white oak, the Mexican "roble," known as the *Quercus lobata,* is used extensively as are the acorns from many other species of oak. (There are about fourteen species of oak trees in California and about eight of these are found in the southern part. Along the California coastal region proper the Indians depended a great deal on the *Quercus agrifolia.* This is the coast live oak, one of the black oaks known as the Mexican "encino."

In preparing the acorns for use as a foodstuff, the Indians eliminated the tannin in the seeds in several ways. Among the Hupa the acorns were most commonly hulled and ground to a fine flour on a hard smooth slab of rock with a pestle. Then the flour was sifted through a basketry sieve, the bitterness leached out and the meal cooked.

In leaching the acorn flour, the dry material was placed in a sandy cone with a cup shaped top and hot water poured through it a number of times until the bitterness was removed. Sometimes a basket was partly filled with sand, the dry acorn meal placed in it and the water poured through. Again, acorns were often buried in a swampy place and left for a long period of time, sometimes for almost a year, brought out, the meat in a purplish condition, roasted on the coals, pulverized and the flour cooked. Again they were shelled, set in a basket until moldy, then dug into the clean river sand. After some time they turned black and were ready for roasting. However the use of the sand cone or sand basket and hot (and cold) water was the most common method.

I should imagine you could achieve the same results in much the same manner. Gather your acorns, spread them out to dry, hull them, pound them up or run them through a coffee grinder, put them in a fine meshed sieve and run hot water through them. Cook the meal as you would mush.

Undertow

SOME pertinent facts about a dangerous phenomenon.

Request:—"I am a good inland swimmer and have been in the surf at various places in Texas and California. Everywhere and all my life I have heard of ocean undertow and of its catching and drowning good swimmers, yet I have never met any one who had actually been caught in it. I have been given all varieties of advice about what to do when caught in it, from diving to bottom and jumping up through it to just holding the breath and going with it until it brings one up again. Most swimming beaches claim there is no such thing there, but is at others, etc. Now I would like to know:

1. Is ocean undertow a special current or only a manifestation of the usual back flow of water from the beach?

2. Does it run straight out into deep water or does it come to the surface after a short under pull?

3. At what depth of water does it occur in dangerous strength?

4. Is it likely to be dangerous to a fairly good swimmer?

5. If caught in it, what is the proper procedure to get out?

6. Does the dangerous undertow form suddenly at unexpected places or can one tell it is there before getting in too far?

7. Does it occur near the beach in, say, waist deep water or out where the breakers begin or beyond?"—C. B. AMBROSE, Fort Worth, Tex.

Reply, by Mr. Louis DeB. Handley:—1. Undertow is, as you state, a manifestation of action of the waves in sweeping up the beach and receding. The waves follow the surface and come in close succession, so that the receding water is forced downward and produces the outward undertow.

2. Usually the direction of the undertow is straight outward. At beaches where sand bars near shore cause the water to be uneven in depth, or where the tides run parallel to the shore line, cross currents often are generated and then it may take any slant. I really do not know how far from shore the undertow continues, but I do know that the rougher the sea, the farther out it is felt.

3. The undertow is most dangerous at the point where one is about to lose footing, not because it is strongest there, but because one is most likely to be toppled over and drawn under and outward.

4. Yes, it may be dangerous to even a good swimmer, when the surf is running strong, because a comber breaking over him may half stun him, at the same time forcing him downward, where he will be dragged out and most likely be pounded by another crashing wave as he struggles to the surface.

5. It is difficult to state what should be done when caught in an undertow, for the simple reason that widely differing factors may enter the consideration and circumstances must decide the method of procedure. When possible, however, the best plan is to swim for shore and try to take the waves so that they will help one in. But if the waves are strong enough to be dangerous one should face each one as it approaches, dive under, then sprint for land between waves.

6. The undertow forms with the rising sea and one can feel it before venturing too far out. It is strongest and most dangerous where the beach shelves rapidly.

7. The undertow starts where the incoming wave meets the outgoing, virtually on the beach, but, as I have said, the bather feels it most when about to lose footing. Beyond the breakers I have never, personally, found any undertow.

Marquesas

THEY are practically "forgotten isles," out of the trade routes and out of touch with the world in general. And as a rule too much of their languorous beauty is not good for the average white man.

Request:—"It seems to me that the Marquesas Islands which supported a large population in Melville's time and are now comparatively deserted, offer a fine opportunity for settlers. Could not a white man make at least a comfortable living there without drudgery and enjoy the fine climate and country?

Immigration is not restricted to Frenchmen, is it, or obstacles put in the way of people of other nations who wish to come into the islands?

Where could I obtain detailed information about what would be necessary in money, equipment and experience to a person going to the islands—if the idea is feasible?"

—D. R. CUMMINS, Pinecrest, Tuolumne Co, Calif.

Reply, by J. S. Meagher:—Although your supposition that the Marquesas Islands offer a fine opportunity for settlers would seem warranted, when one reads so much about the wonderful islands of the South Seas, at the present time, as a matter of fact, there are very few white people who want to reside permanently in the islands. There are many of course who have the idea, just like yourself, but very few who have actually carried it out. This has been the case up to the present at any rate, and what the future will be is a matter open to conjecture.

The conditions of life when the islands supported a large population of Marquesans, in their savage state such as Melville found them, and in the Marquesas Islands as they are today, are of course entirely different propositions, when we consider the question of white settlers coming in to replace the vanished race.

To start with, it is somewhat difficult to ascertain just what the policy of the French Government seems to be. French Government in the South Seas is a peculiar business and often pretty hard to figure out. Land in the South Seas in practically all islands is protected for the natives, who, however, have the right to lease for a long or short period according to leasing laws of the different governments.

Many difficulties often arise when leasing land in French islands, not the least of which is dealing with the native owners. In the Cook Islands (British) leases are for such short periods as to make them unsatisfactory. The chances for a man who has little influence and means, etc., are pretty slim when we consider the chances for him to get any concessions. Large plantations in the South Seas are in the hands of the big fellows—that is the companies.

COMING to the question of making a living, we must consider that such islands as the Marquesas are forgotten isles. There is practically no progress or endeavor of any kind. They are out of touch with the world and have no regular port of call for steamers, as they are out of the regular trade routes. The Union Mail Line steamers pass up the Marquesas on their way to Tahiti and mail is sent to the Marquesas only once in about two months. The mails are carried from Tahiti by schooner. Trade with the Marquesas is not very great and the copra output is usually small. The latter is the product of coco-palms owned in small numbers by natives and from wild palms.

There is no plantation on an extensive scale in these islands as yet. Much of the interior of these islands is unsuitable to plantation and mountains of volcanic rock rise to over three thousand feet with dense tropical jungle, with many varieties of strange fruits and flowers. White men have lived here without any means of support except what the islands provided in natural resource. They have accustomed themselves to native *kai-kai* or food and have been satisfied for a time. They have to forget white standards of life, of course, and are usually classed as beachcombers. Some of these latter are good fellows, I dare say, but this kind of life does tend the white man to degenerate as those familiar with the South Seas will testify.

Much has been written of the beauty and climate of such islands as the Marquesas and Societies, but while the islands are undoubtedly beautiful the climate and other features are not so favorable to the white man, or at least not nearly so favorable as has sometimes been made out. The often described languorous warmth is usually enervating and even at night does not make for comfortable sleep. The white man is inclined to the minimum of effort and is better off not to sojourn too long in these balmy isles. Insects of various kinds are numerous and incessant rain in the wet season is often the bane of existence. The monotony and loneliness of island life is also unbearable to many.

To sum up I would say that if I was thinking of going to live permanently in the islands, I would figure on having at least a small remittance coming to me regularly, as a sure income, which would assure me of a certain standard of living. Thus assured of a comfortable existence one could afford to wait for whatever opportunities or developments might arise at any time later.

As regards equipment, it is difficult to say, since it depends on what a man intends to do or what plan he has in mind. Most of the labor is done by hand and there is little machinery used, except perhaps by large companies in some islands. The French levy duty on most articles shipped into the islands. Houses and sheds of all kinds are constructed with tin roofs, as the rain is the principal thing you have to figure on. They may be open at the sides but must have a rainproof cover overhead. About $1,000 is the least I would figure on to make a start. Experience can only be gained on the spot, as conditions in this part of the world are totally unlike those anywhere else.

There are no special obstacles placed in the way of nationalities other than French, although the latter are naturally favored. One has to pass through the regular channels of entry of course subject to certain restrictions. Passports are necessary and have to be viséed by the French consul at port of departure. Address of the French Consul at San Francisco is 110 Sutter St.

Tickling Trout

YOU MAY think yourself gullible to believe this, but it *can* be done.

Request:—"Can you give me any particulars about tickling trout. I *know* that it is practised to some extent in England, but chiefly, I believe, by poachers who use this method to steal the fish from the trout streams that run through large estates. Any information that you may give me on this subject will be appreciated."—HENRY DISSTON, Tacony, Pa.

Reply, by Mr. John B. Thompson:—The matter of tickling trout in this country is not much in vogue. I have seen it done on spawning beds, and also by disturbing the water until it was muddy, thus forcing the fish to seek shelter under the banks. The hand was gently lowered to the belly of the fish, then gradually worked up to the gills; thus the fish was captured. I once saw this done, too, with a small muskellonge and, later, with catfish in the South.

Buffalo

IN VIEW of the fact that several queries concerning buffalo hunting in Australia have recently been addressed to Mr. Alan Foley, he has written the following brief summary of the subject.

So far as America is concerned, the day of the buffalo hunter has passed. But in the Northern Territory of Australia, buffalo herds are still awaiting the challenge of the adventurous.

The Australian buffalo is more closely related to the true buffalo than is the American bison. It is descended from *Bubalus buffelus*, a species of cattle, native to India, which has spread in a semi-domesticated state as far west as Italy, and as far east as the Malay Peninsula.

Buffaloes were first introduced into Australia in 1825 by Maurice Barlow, then commandant of Melville Island, who imported three animals from the Timor district. At subsequent times more were imported; and when, in 1849, Northern Australia was for a time abandoned, there were several herds in existence on Melville Island and on the mainland.

By 1885, when the district was re-visited by the English, great herds existed. These were mostly

found along the Alligator River, Northern Territory, and, for a time, they were killed at the rate of about two thousand a month for their hides.

Right up to 1912 buffalos existed in great numbers. Today the herds have been seriously depleted; but they still exist in sufficient numbers along the coastal areas of Northern Australia to provide good hunting for the sportsman.

The Australian buffalo is famed for the phenomenal spread of its horns. While clumsy of gait, it can develop an astonishing turn of speed; and although not inordinately savage it is a highly dangerous adversary when wounded.

Motor Trip

ANY ONE who contemplates an extended journey ought to find many helpful pointers in the following:

Request:—"I am considering a motor trip into Mexico. Can you advise me on the following points:

1. What would be the best light car for a journey over dirt roads, much of it through deep mud. How about the new Ford, or the Chevrolet?

2. What spare parts would you recommend for a rough trip, lasting probably six months?

3. Are there any special peculiarities of tropical driving with which I might have to contend?

4. What would be the best way to carry a large stock of extra gasoline say 30 or 40 gallons?

5. Do you know of any special windlass arrangement to be used in pulling the car from mud holes?

6. Could a car like the new Chevrolet closed job be used for sleeping, and what conversion is necessary?"—R. H. ADAMS, Detroit, Michigan.

Reply, by Mr. Edmund B. Neil:—1. My recommendation as to the best light car for a journey into Mexico would be either the old Ford, the Chevrolet or the Dodge four cylinder car. It would be difficult to secure parts for the new Ford, and with all due respect to it, this car has not seen sufficient service to make certain that troubles incident to new designs have been eliminated. Of the three jobs either the Chevrolet or Dodge should be satisfactory.

2. For spare parts I would recommend the following: One rear axle drive shaft. One set of front wheel bearings complete. Extra set of ignition points. Extra ignition coil. Extra condenser for ignition unit. Two engine valves, two valve springs. Fan belt.

For Chevrolet, one extra connecting rod complete with bearings or pair of connecting rod bearings for Dodge. (Connecting rod bearings on Chevrolet are integrally attached to rod itself while on Dodge they are removable.)

For Chevrolet, extra clutch throw out bearing, thrust bearing clutch discs with friction surfaces attached, clutch springs, in fact all moving clutch parts except pressure ring or disc. (My reason for this recommendation is that Chevrolet clutch parts might require replacement due to operation of vehicle under severe conditions. However, these are not absolutely essential except possibly it might be well to take along an extra throw out collar assembly. Extra brake lining, ties, tubes, tire valve parts, etc., in addition to tire pump of good quality.

3. My own experience has been that about the only difference in driving in hot countries than elsewhere is that you may have some trouble in securing good water for the radiator. In many sections of the southwest the water is high in alkali so that if you find that it is necessary to replace the water in the radiator frequently it would be well to use only rain water and possibly carry some along. I have used the canvas water bags which hold about two gallons for this purpose. If you use these be sure to purchase ones which will really hold water; that is, having carefully sewed seams and made of closely woven duck.

It may also be necessary to do considerable second gear driving which places extra strain on the transmission aside from heating the engine. In this connection it might be advisable to take along a set of transmission countershaft bushings if you use the Chevrolet since second gear work involves the use of this shaft and on the Chevrolet it is mounted on plain bronze bushings. On the Dodge anti-friction roller bearings are used which makes this car a little better in this respect.

If you expect to make an extended trip and can find space for it, a single large tank could be arranged so that gasoline could be fed into the regular tank through a copper tube. However, while the use of the large tank is convenient, it is open to the disadvantage of evaporation and leakage so that on one trip I have used the standard five gallon tin cans which have a wood covering. In any case it is advisable to keep a tank fairly well covered in hot weather to prevent undue evaporation of the fuel. The five gallon wood covered tins can be purchased for 50c or $1.00 each and can, of course, be used to replenish the regular tank supply when this is exhausted.

5. The best arrangement that I know of to assist in pulling a car out of the mud is through the use of a drum which can be attached to the spokes of the rear wheel and over which a light rope can be snubbed. The disadvantage in using one of these drums is that if the other wheel can not obtain traction it will spin due to the action of the differential in the rear axle. While you might install one of the special differentials which prevent this, it is my feeling that they are not so ruggedly constructed as the regular standard unit, hence if you could secure two drums or carry along a plank a few feet long to place under the free wheel, it would be a help. Some travelers in rough country carry three or four one-inch planks about a foot wide and three or four feet long, so that they can be placed under the wheels, making a continuous track through placing them in front of each other as the car is moved forward.

However, I defy anything in the way of equipment of this kind to get one out of gumbo or similar mud other than a good, strong team of horses. On the

other hand I don't believe that conditions will be so severe in Mexico as they have been in Kansas due to the peculiar nature of the mud in that section of the country, although personally, I can not speak from actual experience. I list below some of the companies making drums for attachment to the wheels.

Mud Extricating Chains or Hooks

Chain Products Co., 3936 Cooper Ave., Cleveland, O.; Bazark Corp., 1140 Harrison Ave., Rockford, Ill.; Chicago Tire Lug Co., 336-38 W. 47th Street, Chicago, Ill.; Gripper Mfg. Co., 536 Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, Ill.; Lee's Tire Chain Industries, Inc., 308 E. Water St., Jefferson City, Mo.; Reiff Auto Chain Hook Co., J. G. London, Wis.; Seegar Chain Co., 527 Ninth St., Washington, D. C.; United States Chain & Forging Co., Union Trust Bldg., Pittsburgh, Pa.

Car Extracting Winches and Blocks

Bay City Foundry & Machine Co., 1618 S. Water St., Bay City, Mich.; Pull-U-Out Products Co., 220 S. Eighth St., St. Louis, Mo.; Smith Mfg. Co., C. F., 530 S. First St., DeKalb, Ill.; Upson-Walton Co., 1200 W. 11th Street, Cleveland Ohio.

In addition to these drums you might take along several so-called mud hooks which can be clamped around the tires, these function with tractor cleats.

6. I see no reason why the new Chevrolet closed car could not be used for sleeping purposes. In this connection I would suggest writing to the Engineering Department of the Chevrolet Motor Car Company asking them for suggestions regarding the best method of converting the car to this use. Generally it is necessary to cut away the back of the front seat and arrange it on hinges so that it can be tipped backward against the floor, or if the removable type front seats are used, it might be possible to take them out of the car and use the entire floor as a sleeping compartment. There are one or two special models of cars on the market today which have the front seat arranged for sleeping but I do not believe the makes of cars themselves would be as good as those recommended for your purposes.

Erratum

THROUGH an unfortunate editorial slip, the excellent article on mountaineering that appeared in the November 15th issue was credited to Dr. Fordyce. Our apologies to Horace Kephart, who *did* write it.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

A complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the first issue of each month.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

February 1st Issue

YE gods! What unholy doings are these? Easy, dear reader, it's only Dirty Shirt Jones and Ike Harper in the gayest, cleverest, most uproarious Piperock story you ever read. You will laugh till daybreak.

The CATSPAW *of* PIPEROCK

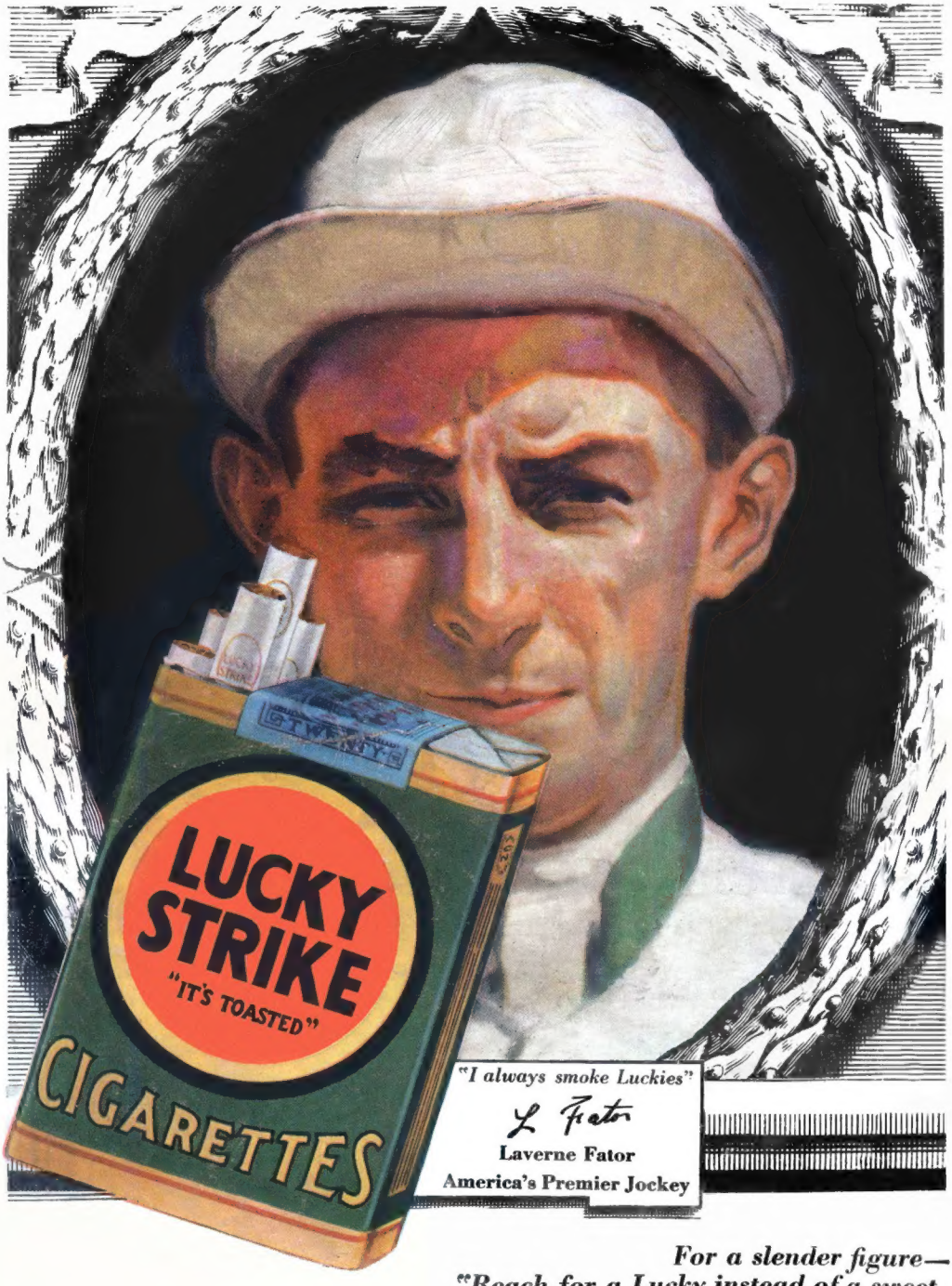
By W. C. TUTTLE

Also—*A brilliant novelette of the Foreign Legion*
By J. D. NEWSOM

And—*Other Good Stories*

A Tucket Of Drums, a novelette of mysterious India, by Talbot M[illard]; An Eye For An Eye, a story of the high seas, by Bill Adams; King [illegible], a story of a master road builder, by Guthrie Brown; An Old Bird, a [illegible] of Army flyers on the Border, by H. P. S. Greene; Pardners, a sto[ry] the Canal Zone, by Edgar Young; In The Ditch, a dramatic railroad s[tory] by E. S. Dellinger; The Road To Sandoval, a novelette of the New M[exico] range, by Allan Vaughan Elston; and another thrilling instalmen[t] Clements Ripley's great novel of revolution in Latin America.

Berbers, those strange nomadic people wandering over the Sahara, were ever romantic figures. GEORGES SURDEZ, who knows this region so well, tells the story of one noble Berber, *Lakhdar ben Lardaf,* who carried off the woman of his choice, was captured, and about to be put to death, when . . . you will find this stirring tale complete in the February EVERYBODY'S . . . Also stories by EDGAR WALLACE, L. G. BLOCHMAN, ANTHONY M. RUD, JOHN STUART ERSKINE, THOMAS THURSDAY, H. M. SUTHERLAND, R. E. PINKERTON, E. S. PLADWELL and many others. EVERYBODY'S, you know, is 25c a copy at all newsstands.



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